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Prologue

The full moon glared down at the camp like a cataract. The camp was desolate with the rest of the warriors being out at the gathering. The only cats left behind was a queen and a medicine cat. The queen's yowls had awoken Sootleaf from his medicine den, but now that the queen had given birth to her only kit, the panic was over.
Sootleaf lay cool moss on the queen's fur.
"Lap your kit," Sootleaf advised her, "Warm her up."

She did so. Her heavy breathing had stopped as she calmed down a bit. She finally spoke to the grey medicine cat, "She was born, alone in a camp with just us. Seems a little sad, doesn't it? Who would have known she'd be born on the night of a full moon."
Sootleaf looked away, holding back a smile. He knew.

"Two cats isn't exactly isolation, but I get what you mean." He purred and flicked his tail, "But you can't name her after that, can you? Lonelykit, Lonekit, Isolatedkit..." He sniffed at the kit with his pink nose. "You know... the typical VenomClan route to naming things."

Brambleleaf looked to her kit with warm, amber eyes. "I should name her after her pelt," she mewed after moments of silence.

"Frostkit." She finally decided. The stars outside twinkled their agreement and the queen couldn't help but grin. She was happy that she had a kit, despite only having one and it being a she-cat. Her mate would probably be upset with her, and leave her seeing as she has had an unsatisfactory birth, but at least she had a surviving kit. And although Frostkit was born with really nobody around to celebrate her existence, Brambleleaf had no doubts that she'd make friends and become a great warrior.

Sootleaf grinned and nodded, "Well I must go. You need your rest, it is late. When your mate comes back from the gathering I am sure

he'll be proud." He left, tail sweeping the sand back and forth, and back and forth.

"He asked for a tom." Brambleleaf muttered.

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Brambleleaf heard pawsteps approach and she lifted her head. Her only kit, suckling at her belly, mewed and pawed desperately. Brambleleaf searched the outside. It was daytime now, and the pawsteps were those of her mate coming to visit her. He had a sneer on his face.
"My kits? Did you birth them yet?"
Brambleleaf beckoned to her only kit.
"One? And a she-cat?" The tom began to bristle.

"She's strong, Rodenttail!" She snapped, "And I can't help what comes out of me."

"So you're blaming this, what, on me?" Rodenttail grew defensive, his nasty bald tail flicking at its pink end.

"Not at all!" Brambleleaf yowled defensively. She got up, letting Frostkit mewl as she fell over. "You need to stop pinning your anger on me. I'm your mate you know. You love me."

"Do I? I remember giving you one mission and one mission only. To give me a *son.* This here is no son." He batted at Frostkit, nudging her, but that was enough to snap the thin string holding Brambleleaf back. She hissed, baring her fangs.

"Back off from my kit! She's mine, you hear? You can have a son with some other cat if you please, and I'm sure you do please!" Her pelt was bristling and her tail lashed in front of Frostkit.

Rodenttail was already beginning to leave, claws unsheathed and kicking up sand. Brambleleaf panted, watching him leave to join a patrol, or entice a few she-cats or something. Typical VenomClan mating behaviour.

"What a..-" Brambleleaf growled and turned to stare at Frostkit. For all the trouble the kit had caused, Brambleleaf would never hate

her.

"Little kit. I only hope you grow up to be great. I hope you never have to live in isolation."

Allegiances

Venomclan:

Leader- Russetstar: A russet coloured tom with a sturdy build and dusty orange eyes.

Deputy-Wolffang: Tall and muscular mahogany tom with jet black, dark brown, and light grey markings along his pelt along with many scars and a heavily chipped ear. Bright and glowing golden eyes

Medicine cat: Sootleaf- A grey tom with large milky white eyes.

Warriors:

Redwillow: A red tom with long legs and a longer muzzle. Dark and cheery amber optics.

Brambleleaf: A light brown tabby she-cat with sparkling green eyes.

Harpyfang: Darker brown tabby with jet black thick stripes and wide amber eyes.

Skeletonjaw: A white she-cat with black stripes on her jaw and along her tail. One ear entirely torn. Bright green eyes.

Longscar: Russet tom with a long scar down his side. Brown eyes

Icemarrow: White tom with darker white flecks and icy blue eyes

Darkheart: Jet black tom with dark and narrowed brown optics.

Redfang: White tom with russet flecks on his muzzle, spine, and tail. Hazel eyes.

Addersmoke: Ashy grey tabby tom with yellow eyes and white fur flecking his muzzle from age.

Silentdawn: A lean and skinny dark grey she-cat with bright cobalt-coloured paws and long black claws. Eyes are a bright azure.

Thundereyes: A dark brown nearly black tom with bright yellow mesmerizing eyes.

Thorntail: A light brown she-cat with darker brown tabby markings on her tail, and a white underbelly. A scar lies near her mouth and stretches down her jaw. Her eyes are a base blue.

Apprentices:

Frostpaw: White she-cat with a dark grey chest + scruff, ears, and back left and front right legs. Light grey patches on back right and front left leg and tail. Blue eyes

Skullpaw: White tom with black and grey patches. Mesmerizing yellow eyes

Queens:

Redstorm: Russet she-cat with a white spine and dark blue eyes.

Kits:

Bloodkit: Dark grey tom with an amber streak down his spine and tail. Dark ginger eyes.

Gingerkit: Ginger she-cat with darker amber eyes.

Sandclan:

Leader~Morningstar~Black tortoiseshell she-cat with dazzling gold eyes.

Deputy~Bigflame~Large and muscular red she-cat with black ears and paws but a white blaze and legs and underbelly, with large green eyes.

(Later Bigstar becomes leader, Cougarfang becoming her deputy)

Oakclan:

Leader~Birchstar~Brown tabby tom with green eyes.

Deputy~Coalspots~Tall white tom with dark black patches and friendly blue eyes.

Greenclan:

Leader~Blackstar~Wily dark brown nearly black she-cat with brown eyes.

Birdclan:

Featherstar~Long-furred grey she-cat with a feathery tail and light azure eyes.

Rockclan:

Leader~Blizzardstar~White she-cat with grey, darker grey, and pale cream markings and sharp fiery blue eyes

Chapter 1: Argumentative Venomclanners

Frostpaw looked up at her mentor's red pelt. "So we're done training now?" She asked, hoping it were true. They had just been patrolling in the unforgiving green-leaf sun and she was exhausted.

"Yes." Her mentor nodded his head at her, his fur burning a copper shine in the light of the dipping sun, "You deserve some prey." The two padded in the direction of camp through the warm sands of VenomClan territory.

Slowly a large mass rose from the horizon as they made their way back. The Tangled Willow, the only true life in the territory besides the cats that lived around it. Frostpaw glanced at the activity around the tree with her dark blue eyes, spotting some training and some feasting, all the cats looking like black insects scuttling around the large tree.
The deputy of VenomClan had told the mentors they were allowed to train with claws, as harsh as they can so their apprentice could learn more 'efficiently'. Russetstar had advised against this, saying that training does not need to be done with claws, and that wounding our cats before battle was unwise and foolish. Wolffang had argued that it caused the apprentices to experience battle before truly entering it, and that the wounds inflicted would serve as reminders from their training.

Even then, Redwillow, Frostpaw's mentor, has never lashed a claw against her.

The Tangled Willow came into full view along with the cats scattered below. Their voices became audible, and they were loud. No matter what time of the day, VenomClanners were usually loud.

Russetstar stood amidst his own warriors, talking as well. He was facing his deputy, arguing again. "I still don't think our warriors need scars before they have truly earned them!"

"You don't think training is serious enough to give scars?"

Russetstar reared up on his hindlegs, paws extended and a snarl on his face. Frostpaw watched with horror. *He wouldn't strike, would he? Even after defending the apprentices?*

Wolffang faced him boldly, a smirk played on his wideset maw. Instead of charging, Russetstar leaned forward, "When it's your time to lead you can ruin this clan any way you want. *I'm* leading for now. Besides, you think warriors come out great when you beat them senselessly? Look at Longscar!"

Frostpaw turned her head back and forth to search for the cat she had always avoided since kithood. He was sitting outside the Warrior's den, head down, eating prey slowly. The scar along his side was massive, a grievance given to him by his mentor, the deputy. She avoided him due to his strangeness; an oddity he was. He was not approachable, but he didn't seem sad from the lack of company. No cat spoke to him.

"He came out emotionless, a soldier. It's as if he's given up all feelings for you." The leader growled.

"Better. With feelings come pain, and Longscar feels none of that." Wolffang mewed smartly.

Russetstar bristled, his pelt making him look twice as big and twice as sharp, "But he was my only kit, Wolffang! You ruined my son!"

Wolffang smirked, "You're welcome." And padded away, tail lashing back and forth slowly. Russetstar slowly calmed down and began to slow his breathing to normal when Redwillow and Frostpaw approached.

"Russetstar..." Redwillow approached quietly to the aggravated leader. The russet tom turned to glare at the two with dusty orange eyes. His maw was still curled, but his eyes had softened as he saw Frostpaw.

"What?" He asked quietly.

"I think Frostpaw's ready for her first assessment." Redwillow began

awkwardly, "The, uh, patrol assessment.

"Yes. Fine. Assessment. Tell me the results after the end of training, tomorrow." He padded away, his tail dragging in the sand, leaving a thin trail.

Frostpaw looked up to her mentor, "What really happened with Longscar?"

"We don't really know. The Clan, I mean. Some bad training I guess." he responded slowly. "I'm tired. Get some prey and go to sleep, you earned it."

She followed Redwillow although he was traveling to the Warrior's den. She was too curious to think about her panging hunger. She would eat later, she decided. She looked up at him, "Redwillow, wait! What about Wolffang? He trained him..."

"Wolffang... Never talk to him. I don't trust him, and neither should you." Redwillow then leapt onto the rock where the rest of the warriors were either sitting or sleeping. They were really uptight on when an apprentice wanders too close to their domain. Frostpaw wandered back to the two propped up rocks and slid in, the darkness grabbing hold of her until finally sleep consumed her.

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She heard voices, progressively growing louder. They were harsh, as if spat at one another. *Arguing.* Frostpaw sadly guessed it was between the deputy and the leader again. She awoke, rolling over in the empty and dark apprentice den. Her eyes slowly adjusted to the brightness shining bright through the surrounding darkness. She slipped from the den and onto the warm sand, the cool breeze ruffling her thicker pelt. She searched for her mentor, and decided he was still asleep. It was early, the sun's head only halfway above the horizon. However, cats were out. Skullpaw wasn't in his nest, so she supposed he was training.

She secretly padded near the two arguing cats on the side of the Tangled Willow. She wondered what Wolffang was saying, and why he was always angry. She wondered why he always targeted

Russetstar, and what he has done, and she thought maybe listening in would help shed light on the situation.

"Icemarrow is abusing Skullpaw!" Russetstar hissed, "All because of you."

"I'm the deputy. You told me when I'm leader, I can do whatever I want with this clan. Well, I want this clan to be strong. When you're dead, this clan will improve."

"You're already predicting my death!?" Russetstar hissed, his pelt becoming spikes again. His orange eyes blazed like brass.

"We all know your time is coming soon." Wolffang sneered, showing the fangs he was named for. He backed away from the angry Russetstar and turned around, head held high and amber eyes gleaming, chest out and tail erect.

No wonder Redwillow doesn't trust him. Arguing with the leader is not wise!

Two cats entered camp. A long-faced white tom with piercing bright eyes that resembled ice reflecting heavy sunlight from its sheer surface. The other cat was white, with black and grey cloudy markings and bright yellow eyes, mesmerizing.

The two toms were arguing as well. Skullpaw, the apprentice, had scratches on his body, and red outlining his usual shaded pelt. Russetstar stared at them with anger.

"Skullpaw, you're not eating. You did horrible! I want us night training later." his mentor scolded him.

"Fine!" The tom limped away, tail lashing to leave trickles of blood on the sand.

This is horrible. Wolffang isn't even leader, yet he's already ordering cats around and making mentors train with claws out. Redwillow's right. I'll never trust this cat, ever. I'm blessed he isn't my mentor. I'll never become a victim of his violence.

Chapter 2: Times are Changing

Frostpaw and Redwillow were standing by the RockClan border where sands stopped and the red rocks began. Beyond were tall mountains both russet and blue, depending on how far back into the sky they went. Because they had such a vast territory, RockClanners rarely patrolled this border.

"Okay, for your assessment-" a voice began. It did not belong to Frostpaw's mentor.

He's here. Why? Can't he trust my mentor to tell me if I pass or not? Frostpaw's pelt twitched and grew hot in nervousness at the tom's yellow gaze. At least Redwillow was not absent-- her mentor was standing next to the other tom calmly. He had not accepted Wolffang's request to watch kindly, and wouldn't have accepted it at all if not for the burly, larger tom being the deputy of the Clan. Frostpaw avoided Wolffang's gaze entirely. Instead, she stared intently across the border, as if she were evaluating something of importance.

"You're at the border." Wolffang growled, "What do you do?"

"First we have to sniff the border and look for, er, fresh scents."

"Or stale!"

Frostpaw nodded and sniffed the border. It was noon and by the amount of RockClan stench along the border, she judged that they may have patrolled earlier that dawn. She turned to her mentor who was watching with a beckoning gaze. "They must've marked earlier this morning. It's fresh, but not as fresh as it could be. It is stale, but not as stale as if they had marked... maybe yesterday?" Frostpaw stammered.

"More description please." Wolffang told her from farther on. She still avoided his gaze and instead stared at his chest

nervously. *Perhaps I should see what he's looking at me like. I want to know if he's angry or not. No... I shouldn't.*

"We're safe, uhm, for now." she went on, "RockClanners were here earlier, meaning they might patrol soon after we are... here... so we should mark really strong-ly." She swallowed back her doubts and looked Wolffang in the chin.

"Good." he mewed, his tone genuine.

Redwillow nodded and murmured, "I told you she was ready, Wolffang." and the deputy scoffed, padding closer to Frostpaw; so close to her that she felt his breath and her own nervous shivers travel throughout her veins.

"Now what do you do?" he asked her, looming above her, his warm breath hot on her scruff.
"Mark, of course. Mark the border with everyone." She began to mark when Redwillow piped in:

"You don't have to actually leave your scent. A patrol is coming out to do that later." He looked to Wolffang and the deputy nodded his head. Frostpaw felt her worry melt like ice. She let out a great sigh, and flicked her tail.
"What now? Did I pass?" She asked her mentor, gazing into his dark amber eyes so she wouldn't have to look into Wolffang's bright yellow.

"I think so. I'll tell Russetstar. Let's go back to camp."

"No." Wolffang growled, "I will tell him."

Redwillow lashed his fiery tail, obviously adamant against the idea, and his voice was wavering when he mewed, "Let *me* do it. Don't talk to Russetstar--he doesn't feel up to it. You can tell he fears you. He thinks you're going... he thinks you're going to *kill* him or something."

Wolffang chuckled and he sadly admitted that this notion was so ridiculous and damaging to the Clan. "Perhaps the reason we're so apart," he mewed solemnly, "is because of these damaging claims.

But then again, Russetstar's always been full of damaging claims." Frostpaw wanted Wolffang to go on speaking, but she was being ushered away by her mentor. They made their way across the territory briskly, Frostpaw having trouble keeping up with Redwillow's longer strides.

"Do I pass? What if I don't?"

"You will unless Wolffang has a say in things. He's been trying to prove me wrong since... Well, since we were both apprentices. His mentor and him were kin, I think. In a way; if not by blood, then certainly by mind and ways of thinking. It's weird," Russetstar mewed as he paced, frowning at the sky, "he was not always like this, but it doesn't matter now. He's going too far." The two were running now, across the warm sands.

Frostpaw tried to catch up, asked between breaths, "Why does he hate you?"

"Ah it doesn't matter." Redwillow muttered, also out of breath. "Forget I ever said anything."

The two stopped running and began to trot as the Tangled Willow came into view. Running straight into camp wouldn't be very becoming of both of them. It would send most cats into a panic, thinking there were enemies on the border, and a battle was about to ensue.
And VenomClanners were quick reactors to that.

Frostpaw looked to her mentor's red pelt. "So... his mentor was harsh, huh? Is that why he gave the same kind of mean training to Longscar?"

"No. He didn't give the same training. Wolffang has feelings, does he not? Wolffang can speak openly and show his anger. Longscar is different. Longscar's a shell. Apathetic to the world around him." His tail flicked as he set off for Russetstar, sitting on top the Tangled Willow.

Frostpaw knew she'd pass. It was rare for a mentor to say 'I don't think he or she passed' to the leader, and rare for even the leader to

deny an apprentice his or her right to become a warrior. Well, it was VenomClan, and there was one thing VenomClan regulated so that it could be possible for an apprentice to fail: battle. Battle training, and if an apprentice failed their battle assessment, they'd fail to advance to warrior-hood. But Frostpaw knew that she'd pass her battle assessment when it came. She left her mentor to talk privately with her leader and went to see Skullpaw in the apprentice den.

"How was your training?" She asked him politely. He usually never spoke with her- he was always too busy training with his strict mentor.

"Better than yours, I'd bet." He swallowed a piece of the prey by his paws, "I was fighting all day!" He turned around and showed her a patch of cobwebs sticking against his pelt. The webs were stained red, "Icemarrow really knows how to train me. And you? Redwillow's weak, sorry to tell ya."

"He isn't weak." She told him, defensive of her mentor. *He's a friend to me, for I have none else. Thanks to you, Skullpaw.* "I bet *I* could beat you in battle."

"Not with a mentor like that!" Skullpaw grew hot, she could tell. His hairs rose and he almost got up from his laying position.

"Why would we want to fight one another? We're a Clan, remember that." A voice called. Frostpaw and Skullpaw both turned their heads to see Silentdawn, a small grey she-cat. She padded off, her tail lashing back and forth.

"That's right. No need to get all offensive, Skullpaw!" Frostpaw told him before running off and into the apprentice den with embarrassment. She didn't like him. She felt a strong animosity towards him. He was too competitive and everyone, even the warriors, seemed like competition to him.

Isn't it strange how times have changed?

Chapter 3: An Unwanted Spar

Frostpaw stood shy in front of Icemarrow. The white tom was speaking harsh to Frostpaw's mentor in a spitting tone, like a snake tossing its venom. "Wolffang is right. We must train with claws. It simulates true battle." The tom's icy blue eyes were piercing Redwillow's as he spoke, as if tempting him only with his gaze. That, or intimidating him into submission.

The red cat's tail lashed, "No."

"Wolffang is watching. Oh, but you wouldn't mind? Your rival since apprenticehood can just grow a bigger ego and tell you for hours on end on how wrong and weak you are." Icemarrow sneered, revealing his sharp canines, pearly white like his pelt.

Redwillow's eyes narrowed into slits and he snarled. Quietly he spoke, "Fine."

Skullpaw lifted his head in pride, "It's okay. I'll finish her quick."

Frostpaw tensed. *How dare he treat me like a cat from another clan. Even then, you don't treat cats like that!* "No." She defied stubbornly, "I'll beat you! I told you that yesterday."

"Go on. End this quarrel between you two with fighting." Icemarrow snickered, "Go on."

For a new warrior, Icemarrow sure acts pretentious. He acts as if he's been around longer than Redwillow and most of the other warriors here.

Skullpaw's yellow eyes seemingly grew darker as he charged, rushing forwards. Frostpaw stood, heart fluttering and waiting until he got close. Suddenly he swerved, and as Frostpaw's paw thwacked out to attempt and trip him, he leapt and came crashing into her side. She yowled as she barreled over and she clawed at Skullpaw to get him off. Blood spilled on her pelt and fur covered her nose

but she still persisted, as did Skullpaw. Soon Skullpaw pinned her and she clawed at his belly as his paws rested on her throat.

"Weak she-cat." He whispered before he clamped his jaws around her ear. She yowled and kicked violently before she finally hauled him off. She lashed his shoulder before leaping back.

Frostpaw jumped up. *I won't let him beat me.* She realized she was bleeding, however, her wounds stinging and pounding irritably. She leapt at him and slammed down on his back anyway, biting into random flesh until blood squirted through her mouth. She heard a yowl and felt victorious, but as thorn-like pain shot through her side she let go of her enemy, red dripping, and threw herself off.

Skullpaw growled and shown red teeth, "Time to die." He rushed forward, and before his claws met Frostpaw's soft throat flesh, a yowl froze them both.

"I think that's enough! They both know how to fight fine." Redwillow tried to persuade Icemarrow yet to no avail as he responded with, "Fool! They'll never learn if they don't inflict wounds on one another."

"The other clans can do it well enough." Redwillow snapped.

"Yet they're weaker. We can become stronger, Wolffang told me." Icemarrow retorted sharply. His voice and his eyes both reminded Frostpaw very much of ice shards. He never seemed polite.

If he's warm-hearted, maybe he's afraid he'll melt. Frostpaw snorted and noticed how much her wounds hurt. She did want to stop, but if Skullpaw was annoying again she had no problem with going on.

Skullpaw looked up at his mentor with those eyes. They often showed some emotion that Frostpaw could not quite place.

"No. We're stopping. Or, at least, Frostpaw is stopping. Skullpaw can find a warrior to battle- I'm sure you'd like that." Redwillow spat before leaving, tail lashing at Frostpaw to follow. She did, glad to leave but not looking back at Skullpaw, to prevent starting another quarrel.

"Where are we going?" She asked as she bounced after him painfully, her wounds throbbing but she found it hard to keep up at a sensible pace, for he was hurrying.

"The medicine den. I'm not letting you stay in this condition no matter what." He told her without looking over. He entered the medicine den and she followed.

Sootleaf looked up from his rest. Still half asleep, eyes shut, he asked, "What? What now? Anything urgent?"

"Just my apprentice needs treatment. I'll be going- you take care of her." And then he left, dissapearing back into the bright outside.

As Sootleaf treated her, an awkward silence filled the den. Frostpaw shattered that silence, "Why don't you have an apprentice?" She asked in a polite tone. She really was curious, "You are in need of one, right? You're sort of old." She looked at her paws, muttering an apology.

"That's fine, you may ask that. Many do." He bit into leafs and carried them over, "It's because every apprentice here is made into a warrior, no matter what. This clan revolves around something else nowadays. No kit comes up to me or shows any curiosity or potential of becoming a medic. They all grow up to be warriors, and belong that way." He shook his head mournfully.

"Oh. Is it because of.. Wolffang?" Frostpaw asked quietly. She was nervous- was this cat a loyalist or no? She thought he wasn't considering his displeasure in his clan.

"Yes." he stopped doing what he was doing with his herbs and faced her with his white orb eyes. "Promise me this- you'll stop training with claws. I don't care what your mentor says. Deny him if you must.. unless it leads to more wounds."

"No. Redwillow's fine. It's Icemarrow- he made me spar."

"Icemarrow's another one. Watch out, Frostpaw. This clan's being overrun with violence. I hope Russetstar can decrease it before it blossoms into something bigger. I've had dreams you couldn't

possibly imagine, and they weren't Starclan dreams. They were... something else. I just hope it can all change."

"Me too." Frostpaw told him with pure honesty, "Me too."

"Frostpaw, I can tell you only one thing. Never let Wolffang control you. Never trust him and never listen to him. His truth is drowning within lies, his intentions buried under false assumptions. But if I know one thing.. what he wants for this Clan. It's nothing good."

Chapter 4: Enemies in a Home

"... And he told me to never trust Wolffang." Frostpaw continued cheerily. Her and her mentor sat on top of a stone, hot in the sunlight. Between them lay a hare in which Redwillow had caught for them both to share.

"Good. I knew I could trust Sootleaf. He's lived to see Russetstar lead in his golden days, before Wolffang grew bolder and bolder, and Russetstar shrank more and more to an insecure leader. Times when I was an apprentice." Redwillow was staring at the prey. It remained untouched by him.

Frostpaw had an idea. Leaning forward, she ventured, "Redwillow? What if I became Sootleaf's medicine cat apprentice?"

"No." he snapped his head up, but did not look at Frostpaw. He stared beyond her shoulder. His eyes sometimes wandered toward her eyes, but they seldom locked gazes. She noticed that often. *He doesn't like eye contact. With nobody, ever. Unless trying to intimidate someone. Poor Redwillow.*

"Why not?" Frostpaw urged.

"Because I know you wouldn't like it. I won't *let* you. *Russetstar* might let you, but Wolffang... Well, let's just say I have some scores to settle, and making my first apprentice into a medicine cat will only cause me embarrassment."

Frostpaw felt like she was just struck, "What?" she was contemplating whether or not to argue. The fact that he never stares her straight in the eyes gave her the confidence to, but he was older than her, and her mentor, after all. But the fact that she couldn't be medicine cat apprentice, solely for him to win a game, made her upset. She approached lightly, "Is that the only reason?"

"Look, Frostpaw, I know you're so inquisitive, but nothing you ask will make me change my mind." He looked behind him when he spoke to her.

"But what if Sootleaf dies with nobody to replace him?"

"More questions..." He muttered just within earshot. "Then perhaps the Clan will realize their mistake. Besides, you don't want to sit in a dark, musty den all day. Plus, you've got Skullpaw to prove yourself to, as I've got Wolffang."

Frostpaw never thought of it that way. *I rather not get into trouble. Skullpaw, Icemarrow, Wolffang and more, they're all the same. I'll just avoid them all and hang onto Redwillow for a while...* She glared her mentor in the eyes, even if he didn't return her gaze. In those copper eyes, there was something. She just didn't know what it was yet.

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Back at camp, Wolffang was sat on the Tangled Willow, engaging in a heated argument with a warrior stood below him. The warrior he argued with, Brambleleaf, glared up at him with blazing eyes. "Stop making fun of Russetstar! He's done nothing to you." She mewed hotly, her tail lashing.

"He's done nothing, that's the thing." He rolled his amber eyes, "And you cannot possibly say he's done nothing to me... do you follow me around all day?" He cocked his head, sneering. Suddenly his posture improved and he glared at the sky as if bored. He sighed, "He's done nothing ever since he became leader."

Frostpaw sighed and padded away from them. She didn't feel for all the arguing that was happening lately. The gathering was soon-- it would be her first, and she needed a clear mind to put up with all of the arguing that'd come with the five other Clans.
Another cat joined the argument: Harpyfang, an older cat with bronze fur and deep black stripes. He passed Frostpaw without a second glance, and approached the argument to defend his deputy.

Frostpaw snorted and left. She hated how the elders were so quick

to defend their deputy. It was as if their minds and opinions were from a whole different time. It didn't matter from when, because it was still archaic compared to what message Russetstar sought to spread.

Frostpaw spotted two kits scuffling: Bloodkit and Gingerkit. Bloodkit was yielding as Gingerkit practically scolded him for doing so. Gingerkit was always the tougher one. Frostpaw cautiously stepped around them on her way to the apprentice den.

Bloodkit threw his head up in seeing her, "Hiya Frostpaaaaaw!" He sang, pushing his sister off and bounding over. Gingerkit followed with soft complaints.

"Hi, you two." Frostpaw greeted the slightly younger kits.

"Can you teach us to fight?" Gingerkit squeaked.

"Yeah! Skullpaw was training with Icemarrow not too long ago. The moves looked... interesting." Bloodkit shuffled his paws, "Can you teach us? Claws in, I mean, uh--"

"No! Claws out, claws out!" Gingerkit mewed, already unsheathing her claws. The two kits were almost apprentice-sized, big enough for one of them to topple Frostpaw over with ease, if enough force were applied. Frostpaw definitely did not want Gingerkit's claws out.

"Ask your mother." She told them as she began to leave. As they continued to pester her, she answered simply with, "I'm busy." Although her motives were to sleep. They kept trailing after her with complaints until she finally collapsed onto her moss. They wandered off arguing, as VenomClan is infamous for she guessed. Finally Frostpaw got her shut-eye.

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A pair of amber eyes seemingly bobbed up and down in mid-air above the Tangled Willow without any owner nor physical form, but they were easily identifiable as the virulent gaze of the deputy. They looked like two harvest moons, and glowed just as bright. A

darker pair were besides them, dull in shine like an oxidized coin. Their haggard yet kind leader.

"The gathering will begin shortly!" Wolffang yowled angrily. His voice coupled with his eyes made Frostpaw find him quite sinister.

Redwillow and Frostpaw were soon standing side by side, and Frostpaw's belly bubbled with anxiety. She whispered to her mentor, "Why's he furious?" Her voice hinted at annoyance but on the inside she was anticipating the worst. *He better not exile Redwillow or something.* She quivered, *If he did, I'd leave with him. We could go somewhere else, like RockClan or SandClan or BirdClan. But I can't climb or swim and neither can Redwillow. Then again, I can't even fight good, so what am I doing here still?*

"And we can *all* watch Russetstar embarrass us once again." Wolffang growled. Some cats in the crowd snickered, and some elders from near the apprentice den nodded with narrowed eyes. Other cats looked away, as if ashamed of their leader. Frostpaw dug her paws into the sand defiantly and whipped her head to her mentor.
"What did he do?" Frostpaw asked, hearing another voice say the same. Her head turned and she saw Skullpaw, standing there besides Icemarrow with his own yellow eyes beaming in curiosity.

The two apprentices locked eyes before awaiting their mentor's answers.

Icemarrow answered suddenly, "He's lazy! He started off as the laziest leader I have ever heard of! He even delayed his selection for deputy until fairly recently. He also thought 'peace' was about 'revealing our innermost Clan secrets!' What a mouse-brain! He told the Clans *everything*." and he lashed his long, lean tail. "And have you seen the thing in battle?" He shook his head.

"He just... tried his best. And he did do some things in front of the Clans that weren't exactly appropriate..." Redwillow murmured, "But he does have heart."

"Was it something he *did,* or something he *said?"* Skullpaw mewed, a smirk playing on his face.

"Doesn't matter." Redwillow snapped, "Now hush, we're seeing who gets to go to the gathering."

Wolffang circled in place before sitting on the Tangled Willow with a professional air, "Russetstar and myself are going, of course, along with Sootleaf, Strongheart, Rodenttail, Darkheart, Redfang, Thundereyes, Thorntail, Icemarrow, Redwillow, their apprentices, and that is all."

Frostpaw heard Brambleleaf's voice, "Unfair! I could of *sworn* I was going earlier."

"Don't argue with the future leader, then." Rodenttail spat. Brambleleaf opened her mouth to argue, but in seeing the glitter in Rodenttail's orange eyes, she turned and sped off.

Soon all of the named cats gathered beneath the Tangled Willow and waited for Wolffang and Russetstar to lead the patrol. Frostpaw's tail flicked. She was excited and scared at the same time. She yearned for a friend besides her mentor to talk to. Skullpaw was an option, but he frightened Frostpaw too much. Besides, he was an *opponent*, as Redwillow had pretty much put it. Instead she went to the back and became the caboose of the group.

As they departed, she stuck to the back of the back, a few fox-lengths behind the last cat. She shuffled her paws through the cool sand and followed the stars and the moon to the gathering place.

"Oh, I bet it'll be fun. Lots of cats there, friends to make." she spoke to herself, "and I bet I can get away from my Clan for a while, see how the other Clans are fairing. Oh what a reprieve. But it'll only be for one night."

Chapter 5: The Fury Gathering

Frostpaw's head was down when she accidentally bumped into the cat ahead of her. The warrior turned hissing, forcing an apology from the small apprentice. Frostpaw had her head down for a while longer, watching her paws follow the paws of the warrior ahead of her. Suddenly everyone stopped. She lifted her head, seeing cats scramble up a series of cliffs to a mouth in the mountain above. She frowned. "What is this?" She asked the cat she had padded into.

"The gathering place is up there." he answered, flicking his tail. Frostpaw's jaw fell open and she stood there gaping. She felt nervous.
"So we really have to *climb*?"

The cat's head whipped around. "You're new to gatherings, aren't you?" He snapped. "Well, yeah, we have to climb." He turned around and the line moved until Frostpaw was facing the sheer stone wall.

She struggled and had a cat help her up before getting onto the first rock. It was the first of many, many rocks. She scrambled up until her claws ached and she was struggling to keep her breath. As she hauled herself up and studied the massive cavern before her, she saw huddles of cats conversing with one another. A wave of smells hit her and it was potent; it was the conglomerate stench of six Clans rolled together. She turned her head to see a large stone with white, slightly luminous veins in it where the leaders were sitting and lapping at their paws patiently. The entire thing was exactly as she had imagined, and with a gasp she rushed into the crowd, shouldering past her clanmates to get away from them.

She, feeling oddly brazen at this moment, saw a few apprentices sitting and discussing. She plopped down next to them, piping, "Hi!" with her ears erect.
They nodded, "What Clan are you from?" one mewed.
"VenomClan," she answered as pridefully as she could.
"Cool! I'm from SandClan, and he's from OakClan. Is this your first

gathering?" The grey cat with amber eyes mewed.
"Hi! I'm Coalpaw!" a black and white tom with sapphire-blue eyes mewed.

The grey tom nodded, bowing his head and mewing to Frostpaw, "I'm Cougarpaw! And that over there's my littermate, Blackpaw, but she's shy and likes to pay attention during gatherings," he rolled his eyes.

Frostpaw nodded. She had no littermates, and neither did Skullpaw. When they were both kits she liked to think they could act as if they were related, but they were almost complete opposites anyway. Frostpaw studied Cougarpaw and his littermate and wondered if they were older than she was. Judging by their maturity and their size, they must be.

"I've memorized the leaders!" Coalpaw suddenly boasted, chest out in pride. His tail flicked over to the russet leader of VenomClan, "That one is--" he paused. His eyes narrowed. His lip trembled nervously, "Umm, I know it."

"I thought you already knew them." Cougarpaw snickered.

"I know my own leader." Coalpaw stammered, "A-and the leader of SandClan because of that one fight we had, remember? Nettlestar and Morningstar."

A yowl split the air and all cats simultaneously turned their attention to the leaders. The leader who yowled was a black cat with long white stripes and blazing green eyes. Below him was a thick and muscular brown tabby tom. *Nettlestar, I guess. And his deputy.* "Who's Nettlestar's deputy?" She asked her new friend.

His blue eyes were glued to his leader, "Burdockthorn. But his brother, Birchleaf wants to take his place. We don't know what's going to happen..." He flicked his tail to Birchleaf, who was talking to Wolffang. *Oh no.*

Nettlestar began, "OakClan is very, very strong and no matter how many battles we endure," he glanced at Morningstar, "We will always remain the strongest Clan in the Land." cats murmured at

that ending but Frostpaw wondered if the bold leader always ended his reports that way, seeing as no cats were all that offended by his words.

Morningstar was next to stand. The leader of SandClan was a black tortoiseshell with light green eyes, the antithesis of her foe's fiery green gaze. Below her was a very tall, very muscular and mighty looking ruddy she-cat.
Morningstar began with, "SandClan is very strong, and no battle can penetrate our strength. Both prey and the pond runs well."

The next leader was Russetstar. He stood and shook out his slightly knotted pelt before beginning with, "VenomClan is not the strongest it has been, admittedly." Frostpaw snorted in surprise. That was not information worthy of a gathering.

"Many of my warriors think it's right to *argue* with me." He complained, mainly to the other leaders. "Even my own deputy. I'll be teaching them all a strict lesson."

Cats murmured, VenomClanners in annoyance and the other Clans in confusion. Frostpaw even heard a chuckle behind her and she turned, staring into the face of a stranger who stank like BirdClan. Frostpaw turned back, ears hot. She noticed Wolffang glaring up at his leader with furious amber eyes, and rightfully so. Russetstar should have kept that information to himself. What leader reports on their Clan negatively? From what Frostpaw could see, leaders were meant to put on a tough facade during gatherings and claim they were the best.
Now Frostpaw was embarrassed.

No wonder why the Clan argues with Russetstar. He may be a good leader but he is a bit of a fool, isn't he? He kind of deserves all the trouble he gets if he's really going to complain about it to all of these potential enemies!

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A light rain began by the time they all made it back to camp, but Frostpaw decided it wasn't because of StarClan's sadness or anything ominous like that. She looked up, letting raindrops land

like spit on her muzzle. The sand beneath her wet paws became packed, and the Tangled Willow's silhouetted edges looked hazy.

Soon the rain dripped into her eyes and she blinked, and that's when she realized how tired she was. The world looked surreal with all the rain and languished warriors yearning for sleep after a disappointing gathering. She looked for the rock in which the apprentice den lay under, and saw the outline of a massive tower. She had never stayed up this late before.

She was in a quandary on whether or not she wanted to bring prey back with her to the apprentice den when she realized she was all alone in the clearing. It was just her, and the willow. No-- she heard voices, too. She strained to hear them, but they sounded mad, and came from the leader's den.
She stopped and crouched, her pelt blending into the rain. She heard hisses and snappy voices, and she really wanted to know what Russetstar was up to. She sneaked towards the leader's den, hugging the willow as she neared the entrance.

"You mentioned me at the gathering." Wolffang's voice growled. "You didn't humiliate just me or your pitiful self, but our entire Clan! Must they know how pathetic you are? You've always been like this, you worm. It was bad enough your moons of going to the gathering without a deputy, displaying your *weakness*."

"The gatherings are an honest time for all Clans." Russetstar tried explaining quietly. She could barely hear his voice, but now she was pressing her cold ear against the wet stone wall and could hear nearly perfect.

"You're giving the Clans a sense that we're weak! Haven't you learned from Brindlescar, all those moons ago?"
"I gave them the sense that we're arguing, and we are. They won't attack us knowing we're not in the best of times." He tried to reassure his deputy. "I just spoke honestly so perhaps a leader could offer up advice--"
"I can't wait until you're no longer the leader." Wolffang growled. "And so do most of us in StarClan."
"I've still got two lives left, and I'm planning on using them wisely!"

"If you can't be wise at a petty gathering, then how do you expect to *use your lives wisely!"* And a horrific 'thwacking' and 'whooshing' and 'slam' made Frostpaw remove her ear from the wall in fear that she'd have to run. She heard Wolfstar growl, "I'll send my regards." and a yowl was drowned in either the rain or what, and Frostpaw felt hysterical in her own head, and her heartbeat joined in with the panic.

Frostpaw heard more strange noises, a 'rip' and a 'split' and a 'thump.' She smelled something metallic in the air before all she could smell was the rain's moistness. Frostpaw heard pawsteps and she darted, choking on fear and diving into the safe shadow of the Tangled Willow. She saw Russetstar leave his den. Wolfstar held him like a puppet and let him fall from the entrance of the den. Russetstar looked nothing like a leader anymore. He looked like nothing but pelt.

Frostpaw saw Wolffang's satisfied amber gaze sweep the clearing and the apprentice held her breath. The moment Wolffang's gaze turned away, Frostpaw left the shadow of the tree. She headed straight for the apprentice den and she bolted, without looking back, ducking straight into the den and onto her moss and trying her best to pretend she was asleep this entire time.

Chapter 6: The New Rule

Frostpaw refused to wake, even as she could begin to hear the commotion coming from outside. Redwillow had to fetch her, grasping her scruff and dragging her roughly outside.

She kicked herself away from him, "What's going on?" She squeaked. She knew. It almost surfaced to her tongue and she almost blurted it, but that would add suspicion. *He cannot know I know. I must act scared. I am scared.*

"It's Wolf..star. Wolfstar. Wolf*star*." He sneered. Cats were gathered beneath the Tangled Willow and facing the spectacle above with either apprehension, anxiety, or general excitement. Frostpaw's shiver went up her spine.

"Wolfstar?" She squeaked. "Oh.. because Russetstar's dead."

Redwillow's eyes narrowed and his red pelt bristled, "Yes. You're right, he killed him."

I know he did. I saw. I should've stopped him! "Redwillow.." She began in a small voice as they neared Wolfstar. The new leader yowled for all cats to gather. As he nodded, she went on, "Sootleaf told me to try and stop him. And you.. you don't want him as leader. Is this our fault? Is it my fault?"

"Let him play his game for now, don't you worry. Whoever he appoints as deputy'll be wiser, I'm sure." He sighed, "Unless he chooses Icemarrow or something. But Icemarrow's not done mentoring Skullpaw, who's his first apprentice, so he can't possibly..."

Wolfstar yowled and cats hushed.

Brambleleaf spoke however, "Starclan'll banish you from their fields when you die! Starclan will never give you lives!" A cat named Silentdawn next to her nodded briskly.

"Hush!" A cat named Skeletonjaw ordered.

Frostpaw spotted Longscar seated near, his eyes blank and his head lowered and staring at his paws. She wished to be more like him in the sense where he lacked in emotion. Frostpaw felt she shows too much fear.

Wolfstar went on, "I believe it's time for a warrior ceremony. Frostpaw."

Frostpaw's heart seemingly stopped sudden in her chest. She choked on her own words as she stood. She let a thin and piercing sound like a wail slip inaudibly from her gritted teeth. "Yes?" She asked in a small voice, but nobody heard that either.

"It's time you let go of your mentor, Redwillow.." He elongated the name, "And joined the warriors."

Redwillow's voice was the wind, "Such strange wording he uses." She sensed anxiety in her mentor's words, and in his eyes shone mistrust and suspicion, as well as speckles of fear. Frostpaw felt the same.

"From this day onward you will be named Frostbone." He sneered, staring at her. His eyes spoke to her, using words she could not comprehend. Everything swirled around her.

"But Wolffang." She squeaked, this time heard.

Cat's voices angrily protested, but Wolfstar's was the loudest, "I am a leader now! Tonight I am getting my nine lives. I will have a deputy in no time. One whom I can trust, hopefully. My name is WOLFSTAR."

"Wolfstar." She called, louder. "I am too young to be a warrior.. Make Skullpaw a- a warrior instead."

"That'll come soon." His amber eyes twinkled, "But Russetstar did not realize that age does not make you a warrior- experience does. That's why he's dead now. And Frostpaw, or Frostbone, you.. experienced.. something yourself, didn't you?"

I knew I should've risked my life for Russetstar, or ran away, or something, or something. Sootleaf was right. Help.

Frostpaw swallowed, "I experienced.. much through training."

"Yet you never trained with claws. Hear that? She never trained with claws and she thinks she's experienced!"

Cats yowled out profanities and curses, either at Wolfstar or at Frostpaw who stood there frozen in place. Harpytalon hissed, "Russetstar can rot! Venomclan shall live to see blood again!"

Brambleleaf looked to Frostpaw with pity.

I remember her from the nursery. But here in Venomclan, family never matters.

"That's not what I meant by 'experienced', Frostbone. You know what I mean.."

Frostbone, that's right, her name was Frostbone. Why didn't it fit right? *I'm a warrior now, at nine moons.*

"And the deputy, the deputy you ask? Why.. Frostbone, you're my deputy."

Frostbone swayed. Redwillow burst forward, snarling, sharing direct eye contact with his new leader, "You cannot do this, she's not even old enough to become a warrior! You're stripping her away from me. Let me keep training her, ch-choose Icemarrow as your deputy!" His red tail lashed as pain shone deep within his eyes. Frostbone shivered.

Sootleaf, from the back of the ground, snarled. Cats faced him with looks of hatred, and some with hope. "A clan isn't strong with violence. Ever heard of mental strength? SMARTS? Brain, not brawn?"

Wolfstar looked at him and replied in a snarky tone, "Not anymore. Not in this world. We live in a clan. Statistics of battle is what I want, and that's backed up by strength. I am smart, Sootleaf. Go back to sorting herbs, go back to that cave you seldom exit. We

won't need you until we begin battling- and that's soon."

Brambleleaf wailed openly, "But.. my kit! You cannot make my kit deputy, she's not old enough please, please spare her, please."

Harpytalon swatted her ears and the brown she-cat soon fell silent, looking at her paws and shutting her eyes tight as if reality'd just alter and it'd all go away.

"But she's just as dangerous as myself, in a sense. Just as dangerous as Venomclan'll become." Cats cheered again.

Redwillow growled, "You'll get her killed."

"She's too weak to be deputy!" Skullpaw jeered.

Icemarrow gave a long hiss, "My apprentice is right. What is this?"

Wolfstar's optics glittered, "Don't question me. She'll be a fine deputy so long as she listens. And listen she will." He sneered at her, "Right, Frostbone?"

"Correct." She nodded briskly, clamping down on her tongue after she affirmed it, to keep her from whinging in any way.

What's going on? Am I really deputy now? Is this a joke!? Is he going to throw me from the top of the Tangled Willow, embarrass me!? Or throw me off, kill me?

"And she'll come with me, too, to get my nine lives. But first, we must discuss some things."

Chapter 7: Wolfstar's Nine Lives

Frostbone was in the leader's den. She had never see the inside before, and was surprised at how big it is. However, instead of asking about its origins or staring at the looming walls and high ceiling, she stared at Wolfstar with as much bravery as she could muster. It was not enough.

"Don't be frightened. You shouldn't be frightened. Yet. You know why you're a warrior?"

No. But she had to guess. *Redwillow, help. Please, someone. I don't want to be alone with this cat.* She shivered. "Why did you kill-"

"That's not the question I've asked, but I can answer. But this'll be the last time I answer. He was a BAD LEADER. You were not here long enough to see." He snapped. "Now. Answer."

She thought about attacking him and running at that moment, finding a way to join another clan. Gatherings however would prove dangerous if then. Who would be deputy if she were gone, was the biggest question. She couldn't let any powerful and strong supporter of Wolfstar be deputy. Sootleaf had warned her and told her that they could stop him. She had to listen.

"Because I'm deputy? I have to be a warrior to be the deputy."

"No." He told her sternly. "Because Redwillow was encroaching upon you. No, not like that. He was brainwashing you into thinking power is wrong."

"No. You're brainwashing ME." She told him. She was surprised at how whiny her voice came out.

"And.. I saw you, in the rain, Don't think I did not notice. I don't care if you saw me kill Russetstar- I care that you almost saw.. other things. You'll see them as I get my lives. They're my little 'friends.'"

He wrapped his dark tabby tail around his broad paws, "However, if you were to see THEM and I weren't to see YOU, well, my cover'd be blown."

Frostbone nodded, "So, who are.. are they?"

"Darkforest soldiers." He smirked, "My own. Given to me by my father and the leader of those cats. For me.. in exchange for my murder of Russetstar. They're going to get nine cats to sacrifice themselves for me, for my nine lives. Starclan won't give any up, so my only option left is them."

She nodded slowly. *Darkforest? I've heard nasty tales of those cats. Bloody, gore filled, tales.*

"And when I get my nine lives, you're coming with me. I won't have you running here and telling the clan. I'll be watching you." He stood up and began to turn.

She dared speak, "But." He whirled around to face her. "Why make me deputy if I didn't see those cats?"

"To prevent you from sneaking around my den again. And.. I told you.. you're being brainwashed. Power is good."

Being brainwashed by YOU!

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The stars were scattered across the sky like fallen pixie dust and the moon was a waning crescent, sharp as a claw. The two were in Rockclan territory, legally of course, making their way to the mountains.

I could flee right now. Frostbone thought as her dark eyes were glued on Wolfstar's legs as he padded along the territory boldly. *I could run. I should run. At a gathering, I'll come back to see Sootleaf and Redwillow and rescue them. I really, really could.* She judged Wolfstar's leg length for how fast he might be if she did flee, and if he did pursue her. *He would pursue me. He's told me so much.*

She kept her head down as they trotted along. *But would the clans*

believe him? I could.. I could prove to him they won't believe him. Then the next night, run. She let her ears fall back in forlorn, *But the warrior's den is so close to his den. And he's always watching.*

As his dark silhouette rose, she grew confused for a moment and snapped back to reality. They were at the base of the mountain, and thus began the long climb upwards.

More thoughts ran through her mind, ones of rebellion and some of sadness and the rest were of disappointment in herself. She wove through rocks, following her leader in which she loathed, and climbed ever more higher into the cliff. She stared up at the moon in distaste and frowned at it and all the stars gathered.

"Starclan, where are you now? Letting this cat gather his Darkforest buddies to destroy you? I once had faith." She whispered gently, her words unheard and instead being carried down the mountain as she ascended. "But when I saw a leader's last lives being torn forcefully from their body, I think my faith was lost alongside their life."

Soon a giant gaping maw of black grew until they entered it. A glowing white object shone with ripples of light from inside to illuminate softly on the stone walls.

"Touch your nose to it." He told her. After a moment of waiting, she realized he was going to wait for her. She touched her nose, scared. Suddenly a cold feeling washed her and soon numb joined until she collapsed, but she did not feel.

Chapter 8: Wolfstar's Friends

"No. Not into the light." It was either the light or the darkness, and Frostbone was wise enough to tell which one was worse. But Wolfstar led her to the right, going against her instinct.
She thought of fleeing again. *Fleeing into Starclan? They'd only send me back awake, giving me extra time to leave, but how could I make it down the mountain and into unknown territory by myself?* She instead followed Wolfstar, fearing any more trouble between them.

Wolfstar suddenly vanished in a sheet of grey. Not only size, but the vines and tangles threatening to trip her with each stride as she pursued her leader kept him always ahead and nearly vanishing through more curtains of thick fog.
Soon he came to a musty clearing, thick with the stench of rot. Wolfstar dipped his head to some cats, nine of them, and sat down. Frostbone finally caught up.

"Who's that over there?" A sour-voiced she-cat narrowed her green eyes at Frostbone before giving a yellow smile, "Sit down, dear, over there yeah that's right. Watch, and learn. Soon we'll become *your* friends as well."

Wolfstar shook his head, "She's disloyal to the Darkforest. She's only my deputy so I can keep a close eye and make sure she isn't being corrupted by her mentor or any other cat. She doesn't understand our cause.." he chuckled, "And she's a bit flighty. I rather a sedated deputy than an active and possibly troublesome one, after all."

A grey tabby tom nodded, "I suppose she fears what she cannot understand and that is why she sees us to be evil. Stories, stories."

"Understand what?" Frostbone felt brave enough to ask. She didn't sit but instead stood, bristling. It was cold in this dark world she realized, and she suddenly felt more uncomfortable. She could

easily melt into the shadows and vanish from their hostile eyes if she wanted to.

The grey tabby tom was polite, "I have spent countless moons here. Countless because of the fact it was so long ago I died, and countless because time stops here anyway. I have matured. I was greedy, I had a want for power. I hated the clans for making me so. Well- the clans or The Weak or whatever you want to call them. Weak in body. Weak in MIND really. So Wolfstar and I devised a simple plan, much better... than the one we had before." he growled and glared at Wolfstar with much less than a positive gaze.

Wolfstar continued, "Instead of separate clans, we'd have one clan with one leader. The weak can go and the strong can stay, just like old times before the battle. Only different.. a single group made up of only strong cats. The rest can die or be banished from the land. We hunt for one another, but the cats who cannot catch prey receive none. We all defend one another but the cats who cannot defend receive no defense."

Frostbone's heart was racing. It sounded so perfect but could go so wrong. *If this happens..*

"Let's begin!" A large tom stepped forward, bringing a cat with him by the scruff.

Frostbone became confused. She felt she must ask, "What is this?"

The large tom dropped the shaking cat, "We're Darkforest, we cannot give lives! So we use Starclan cats to give lives. However, since these cats aren't very special, they die in the process." He sneered. "Now no more questions! With this life, I give you strength!"

The cat was forced to touch the Venomclan leader's head, and with that she began to fade. She felt sick.

Another cat strode forward, a small yet sturdy she-cat. Another Starclanner died.

Three more cats went and Frostbone's mind was numb. She

wondered if there would be less stars in the sky after that night, but she didn't think she would notice- there would be more to replace them in the future.

"Scarstar? Are you going to back out as promised?" The sneer sounding she-cat addressed another.

"No, not this time Spider. But if Wolfstar fails and another leader comes to us seeking our guidance, you bet your half-tail." She stepped forward, sighing, "Wolfstar, with this life granted to you.. by a Starclanner I captured." She rested her tail on the apprentice's shoulder reassuringly, "I give you a soul of fire. You will burn bright until the end, whenever that would be." She muttered something as the apprentice sacrificed his life, but Frostbone didn't hear it.

The next cat stepped up, a tall brown tom with wide-set shoulders. "With this life I give you indifference. Whatever plead the weak cats have, you can ignore successfully." He nudged the Starclanner, a warrior, forward.

The tom snapped around, raking the Darkforest cat's muzzle and Frostbone stood excitedly, watching with joy and hope.

However, the tom was easy retained by the other Darkforest warriors until his life, too, was sacrificed to Wolfstar.
A few lives later and it was the grey cat's turn to go.
"Alright. Greenstar goes, then it's done. We'll send you back.. it's near morning I think." A cat told them.

"Almost morning? There's no time here.."

Greenstar!? THE Greenstar!? I should have known when he mentioned his greed and jealousy. The legends speak true. A tom made of selfishness and antipathy made real.

"With this life I give you victory. Every battle you win you will be bathed in glory. In every battle you lose, you will learn and benefit." He hooked his claws into the Starclanner's neck. "I got you a medicine cat, here." He smirked and let them lose their life, fade away, and become non-existent.

Wolfstar stood up and Frostbone did the same, preparing mentally to leave. She will not forget what she had just seen, but she will not say. Wolfstar would know if any information of this event were to slip.

He told her that, "Tell no one. I am watching. If you do, you might end up like Russetstar, and like him, I'll kill ya twice."

Chapter 9: The Team of Three

It has been a while since Frostbone witnessed Wolfstar getting his nine lives. She was sworn not to tell anyone of any part of it-- it was their secret to share. She wanted to tell Sootleaf, or at least just talk to him. He would always leave his den in the middle of the day, claiming he needed to collect herbs, only to return in the afternoon, jaws empty. Frostbone figured he was getting alone time. She needed that, but Wolfstar persuaded her that she didn't need any.

Frostbone confided in Redwillow instead, finding ways to talk with him without Wolfstar noticing. Redwillow told her he wouldn't care. Redwillow told her she was deputy, she should be allowed to do anything.

"Not with Wolfstar here." She always told him.

But Wolfstar was always there.

If Frostbone couldn't talk to Sootleaf or did not spend time with her previous mentor, Frostbone had nobody else to call a friend. She was still smaller than most of the warriors. She should have still been an apprentice. Skullpaw would shoot her murderous looks along with his mentor's icy glare. Brambleleaf looked at her with shame, and the rest with suspicion.
What a deputy I am.

She was isolated from what was supposed to be her family. Clans were meant to be united against whatever was thrown at them, not united to throw themselves at others. But that's what Clans always were. Each leader has their own dream, and it always leans one direction or the other.

Now Frostbone was seated on the Tangled Willow, alone. More stares followed her as cats passed and she instead closed her own eyes so she wouldn't have to see. She could still feel the stares though, pierce right through her lids.
She just couldn't wait for the gathering. Wolfstar was going to

arrive shortly and climb the Tangled Willow to announce the names of the cats who were attending. She predicted in the mind that the cats who will be attending are the cats that aren't shunned by the Clan.

He wants to avoid another embarrassment.

Wolfstar slid from his den. From the Tangled Willow, the mighty leader looked small for once. Wolfstar slithered to the base of the tree and began to climb, using the knots and tangles in the vines to support himself. He leapt up and landed silently besides Frostbone.

She looked to him, "Should I go down?"

"Fine. Stay at the entrance of the camp, we're going soon. I'll join you after I announce the names." He took his seat and Frostbone lifted from hers, climbing down the Tangled Willow, quite thankful to be able to escape just being next to him.

The names he called were, she guessed it, his most loyal supporters. Frostbone sighed and dragged her paws over to where Redwillow was standing, head down.

The tom sighed and looked at the shrew he was eating, "I'm not going to the gathering. Frostbone, all I can do is wish you good luck." He swallowed some of the shrew, "And never listen to Wolfstar."

She nodded. "I'll listen to you and Sootleaf only."

Redwillow stood, glancing at Frostbone for a second before sweeping his gaze aside, "But remember, never anger him. Remember Russetstar?"

Frostbone nodded again, "Yeah." She murmured, "And I'll never forget."

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They were the second Clan to arrive at the gathering. The first was OakClan.

"Try-hards." Frostbone heard Skullpaw mutter and she couldn't help but chuckle. The apprentice shot a look at her, but she ignored it. Anxiety was bubbling inside her, and she rather think about the fact that she had to sit in front of hundreds of cats. Even if it wasn't in the position of a leader, it was still a big factor. She would be sitting beneath Wolfstar, and if eyes weren't on him, they would be on her.

"Nettlestar..." Wolfstar greeted as he leapt up besides the black and white tom. Frostbone reluctantly took her place besides Nettlestar's son and deputy, Burdockthorn.

"Hello." She greeted him.
He stared at her, up and down, mewing, "I never knew VenomClan bred such tiny warriors." and he looked away.

Soon other clans began to pile in, BirdClan then SandClan and finally RockClan and GreenClan. Frostbone searched for her friends. She got up from her seat and dissipated into the crowd. *He won't notice me gone now. When the gathering begins, I'll take my seat again.*

She pushed past the other clans until she found a familiar pelt, and a familiar pair of eyes. She followed it through masses of cats and clumps of fur until her destination greeted her.

"Oh, hey Frostpaw!" The black and white tom called, beckoning her to sit with them with his tail, "What's the matter? You seem scared."

She shook her head, "I-I'm deputy of VenomClan."

Cougarpaw gasped, "How can THAT happen? You're not a warrior, are you?"

"I- Please. Wolfstar killed Russetstar and made me deputy and now-" She realized she was telling them everything. *They're not in my Clan. It's fine. Is it?*

Coalpaw tilted his head, "What? What's going on? What do you mean? And why are you deputy, you're too young!" He moved over as Cougarpaw leapt up and lashed his tail. "And your leader was just *murdered*? Gee Frostpaw, don't leave us hanging!"

A yowl broke the dispute going on between every Clan and every

warrior in the crowd, them being also suspicious of Wolfstar's sudden leadership, and the SandClan apprentice sat and growled crossly to himself, "I want to be made deputy, too."

Wolfstar yowled before any more suspicious murmurs could rise from the crowd, "Russetstar's dead! I killed him. He was a nuisance to my Clan, and now we are stronger without him weighing us down! Now we will show we are strong again. We will begin with SandClan. We will reduce them to as small as they are named after. Then BirdClan, RockClan, to GreenClan and OakClan." He threw his head proudly, probably drowning in vanity, yowling, "But why am I telling you all of my plans? I want you to squirm."

Nettlestar hissed, "You will never defeat us. Your promises are too bold. You'll just rush blindly into battle and find yourself caught in OakClan thorns-- and claws."

Coalpaw besides Frostpaw nodded determinedly. He gave a frightful sideways glance at Frostpaw before sweeping his eyes back up to face his leader with admiration.

"Oh, I will. You'll see. I'll defeat all of you and show you, remind you, that we are strong." Wolfstar shifted comfortably in his seat, as if he belongs there, resides there on the leader's perch.

The leader of GreenClan spat and the leader of SandClan, Morningstar, stood, "You cannot do this, Wolfstar." She told him politely, but a crooked smile was stretched across her maw.

She doubts his abilities to battle them. I don't, however.

The cats besides her began to bristle and Cougarpaw shot her a murderous glare. Frostpaw looked to the side with melancholy until the gathering ended in anger and fumes of mistrust and hostility. The only leader who could share news was Wolfstar-- claws were unsheathing and a battle was threatening to break out. Clouds were swimming towards the moon, and Morningstar thought this was a good omen as any to end the gathering.

Coalpaw whispered, "I cannot believe this. I think a war is coming! We need our Clans to ally, Cougarpaw. I can't belie-"

"I can help." Frostbone whispered.

Cougarpaw snarled, "As if you could!"

"I could spy for you." She yearned to reconcile her wrong, although it was not her fault she was made deputy. "I will. I promise! Next gathering I'll have information."
I can't lose any more friends.

"You better." Cougarpaw growled.

"Come on guys, this is dangerous. You, spying? Sorry Frostpaw, but you're nothing but a glorified apprentice. You know nothing about being deputy, I bet." Coalpaw intervened. However, Cougarpaw interrupted him with a glance and gestured to Frostpaw to continue.

"I'll have all the information. All of it."

Oh no. What have I done? If Wolfstar finds out.. He won't. He won't find out, I won't let him. And I know these cats won't tell.

Chapter 10:The Talk on Power

Frostbone's dappled tail flicked. It has been quite some moons since that last gathering where she had teamed up with the two deputies, and she felt it was going well. They were all warriors now. She HAD gathered information but Cougarfang claimed it wasn't enough to act. It wasn't her fault Wolfstar was so secretive as he kept most of his plans to himself.

However, he had been giving clear signs of a battle, but she wouldn't be able to warn them by the next gathering, unfortunately. He's been stretching the border into Birdclan territory without consent, and it was not long before Featherstar would notice and attack. She was a new leader however- she became leader when Frostkit was born, or around that time. She wasn't a seasoned leader, but hopefully she'd be able to defend her clan.

Especially since it's Venomclan. All we do is train or fight. Frostbone looked down from her perch on top of the Tangled Willow and at the warriors below. It was as she thought- cats were training for battle. Only this time, Wolfstar was with them. He wasn't training, he was instructing.

"Bloodpaw! Gingerpaw!" He barked. "Stretch higher!"

The two kits, Bloodkit and Gingerkit, had become apprentices, one moon before they were due, but Wolfstar didn't mind and neither did their mother it seemed.

Skullpaw became a warrior: Skullcrush. The name sent shivers up Frostbone's spine the first time she heard the name. Even still the name made her feel uncomfortable, not because of its gore, but because Wolfstar was becoming THAT type of leader. The stereotypical Venomclan leader who names cats violent names to sound tougher.

She spotted Wolfstar slinking from the shadows beneath her station on the Tangled Willow and he made his way up, like a snake

wreathing a tree. He sat next to her, and she tensed.

"Look. My clan's growing exponentially. Soon we'll be able to take on the other clans in quick battles. Do you agree with me now, Frostbone, that power is key?"

She shook her head, "No." She answered meekly. "I don't. We'll get into too many battles and we'll get swept up in them, and.." She swallowed and continued, "We'll get torn apart."

"Perhaps we will, if YOU were leader." He snickered. "It all depends. Look down."

She did.

"What do you see?"

"Training in the most brutal of forms."

He nodded, "But brutality answers with victory. The more brutal you train, the more you endure and the more you can battle and the more you can win. It all revolves around fighting you see."

"It doesn't have to." She retaliated, "If we're a docile clan, the other clans would leave us alone."

"No. If there's another clan like Venomclan, no clan'd be safe. Because no clan IS safe. Birdclan doesn't fight much, but they're still violent if you encroach upon their territory. Rockclanners are heavy fighters, but they rarely patrol, let alone fight. Sandclan, another peaceful clan, can easily drive you from their camp if you weren't prepared and if you tried to attack. If you can match to their expectations and more, and feign your clan's strength, you can win."

She pondered on that philosophy. She shook her head, "Why battle, though?"

"It's inevitable either way. Every moon there's a battle or a feud. It's easier to get it out of the way with a massive war, hmm? Rather than wait until we're torn apart by one another moons after, or until the land changes and we all die, or before anything else happens. It's better if one cat leads them all. 6 cats, one land? That's risky."

She lashed her tail and look at him, "But you think YOU'RE the cat to lead them all? What you're telling me is a lie. What you're telling me sounds so good, makes so much sense, but is WRONG. You're tricking cats-"

"So you agree with me?" His amber eyes glinted in the light that streamed from a cloud.

"No. I don't get it. What, we're all going to die out if we all keep our place in our territory?" She snorted, "Ye-Yeah right."

"The cycle of all things living will soon decrease where some clan may feel the need to.. extend borders. That may upset the very fragile balance we clans have."

"They can extend them into unknown territory." She muttered.

"Greenclan's in the middle of other clans, they have nowhere to extend unless they go into Birdclan and Oakclan border territory and cross the monster path into small twoleg land. Rockclan's unknown territory is too risky, one involves a cliff and there's said to be tribes down there. Whatever danger you face now is unmatched to any outside the lands. You must stay, but staying also means fatality."

Frostbone was confused. She shook her head briskly and tried repeating it back to him, "You're saying we must exterminate all the clans before they.. destroy THEMSELVES?"

He sat there for a moment before nodding. "Basically."

"But YOU'RE destroying THEM."

"I'm keeping the strong ones. They can join us. The weak ones are the problem. They cause trouble. The cowards, the physically weak, the emotionally weak, the mentally weak, they're all problems. The strong ones, we need THEM."

"There's something you're leaving out, isn't there?" Frostbone narrowed her dark blue eyes at him and her fur on the nape of her neck rise.

Wolfstar stood up and went to leave. He looked back at her, "I didn't have to tell you anything." He smirked and climbed down from the Tangled Willow.

A cold air rushed at Frostbone right after he left.

Chapter 11: Seeking Advice

She had promised Cougarfang she'd meet both him and Coalspots at the border at moonhigh. She was on a hunting patrol earlier, and had met Cougarfang leading a patrol of his own at the border. He disregarded her angrily and it seemed as if he lamented her, but she tried to ignore that. She didn't care, really. She understood.

Venomclan had attacked a patrol of Sandclan's at the border a few sunrises ago for what seemed like no reason. She didn't know, though. She didn't have the heart to ask, despite her being the deputy and second in charge, so she never knew the reason behind the hostility.

Right now she was eating a vole, alone. She was near the apprentice's den, in the shadows. No cat was near, they were all busy training. She tried not to watch but it was mesmerizing.

"What are you doing? You're a warrior- no the DEPUTY, remember?" A sour voice spat at her from behind. She turned around and stood up to see a pair of floating yellow eyes before the cat slid from the back of the apprentice den.

"Skullcrush, go away." She hissed. Wait. She tilted her head, "Why were you back there?"

"Watching YOU! I don't trust you, you know. I never did. There must be SOME reason you've became deputy!" He stepped forward, his claws unsheathed. His claws were always unsheathed but this time it frightened Frostbone to the point of smacking her half eaten vole at him. It struck him in the muzzle and he hissed in disgust.

Frostbone ran from the camp, knowing her destination already. She

was breathing quick and trying to contain her laughter as her paws kicked up the sand. She felt happier than she had in moons, running out in the sandy fields alone, free, seeking someone she hadn't spoke to in too long of a time.

She leapt onto a rock and felt the wind in her fur, that sweet windy weather. She saw them- a fiery red pelt surrounded by fiery orange sand, reflected by the setting sunlight. She leapt off and ran to them.

"Redwillow!" She yowled. The tom turned around and immediately his eyes lit up.

"Frostbone!" He looked towards her, yet past her, but she saw how happy he looked. "What's going on, why're you yelling?"

"No reason! Just.." She wandered up. Should she tell? She did anyway, "Wolfstar told me his plans." She spilled them all to him and studied his facial expressions which changed from worry to interest to thoughtfulness. *What am I doing? I could be killed for this!*

He sat down. He soaked it all in, "Interesting. I don't believe him. I guess if his plan came into action, he'd kill me." He laughed under his breath. "According to him I'm weak. I don't train with CLAWS. I don't.. I don't KILL for JOY." He growled, "And I certainly don't brainwash cats or create cats like Longscar."

She thought about Longscar. That made her think about Russetstar, which made her think about Starclan.

"Where is Starclan?" She asked him quietly.

"In the stars. But I feel they ignore us and rather shine their light on the other clans." He stood up, "Come on, want to ask Sootleaf?"

Frostbone wished she was an apprentice again and nodded.

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At camp, Wolfstar saw Redwillow and Frostbone together and frowned. Frostbone glanced away and as secretly as she could, slipped into the medicine den with Redwillow behind her. Sootleaf's

ear flicked and he turned around, herbs underneath his paws.

"What is it?" He growled, "Another battle?" He looked spiteful, angry. "I need a medicine cat apprentice! Soon! I cannot do this., I cannot do this FOR MOONS. ALONE. You know how old I am? I remember Russetstar being a WARRIOR." He shook with anger. "I get dreams every night of.. of scary things!"

"Of *what?*" Frostbone asked, coming closer to him and sitting down. Redwillow was shaking his head as he entered, letting Sootleaf's bristling pelt lay flat again.

He looked away and frowned, shutting his eyes. "Of red rivers and lakes and oceans, of pelts laying on rocks, of a chill leaf-bare, many cats gathered in a bunch, starvation and death and the most horrible of practices reigning over good. Three cats sitting on top of the Tangled Willow instead of one. Piled snow, but the snow's not white. It's red. *A deep red.* The stench of death in the air, no sun for what feels like moons and the nights are terribly long and sleepless." His pale eyes flashed and a hiss escaped his teeth, "And that's not even the last of it."

Redwillow swallowed and looked at his paws, "What could it mean?"

"My dreams aren't prophetic! But they all seem to come true from what I know. I dreamt of the corruption of Longscar, I dreamt of Wolfstar on the Tangled Willow, I even dreamt of you, Frostbone, sitting besides him but there was *nothing* I could do." He shook his head, "And no voices guide me but my own."

Frostbone felt a shiver creep up her spine and she was suddenly cold. His clairvoyance sometimes upset her, and the way he shared his talent always sent shivers running cold fingers through every fiber of her body. It racked her with chill.

"I dreamt, a moon ago, of a battle. A huge one, in Sandclan territory. Blood created a lake on the grass for moons after. It lasted sunrises and moonhighs until it finally ended. But not before cats died. All these dreams come by so quick I can hardly latch onto them quick enough but when I do, it's so painful that I remember. I

dreamt of blackness like death. That might be *MY* death! I dreamt of every star switching off. I dreamt of *FIRE. I dreamt of FIRE and BLOOD."* He let a thin and rigid smile creep upon his lips. "I wish Starclan still respected us. They've lost hope in Venomclan, haven't they? Perhaps Starclan could explain my dreaming. Perhaps there was something Starclan could do. Because there's nothing a little weak medicine cat could do alone, or his rag-tag clan of rogues and bandits."

Redwillow spoke gently to the hyperventilating medicine cat, "It'll be fine, whatever'll happen.."

Sootleaf hissed and snapped at him, "It won't be fine, though! I dream of my death, however close that'll be, I dream of the fire, whenever that'll come, and I dream of the blood. Oh the sickening blood. I used to abhor it, but it reminds me of 'home.' I dream of all these things. And they'll come. Oh, how they'll come. And come soon."

"How soon?"

"Only time will tell."

"Do you see anyone in particular in your dreams?" Frostbone leaned forward, "You mentioned you-"

"I dream. Then it fades. I often forget."

"Then how do you know? Don't be a hypocrite with me now." Redwillow snapped, not trying to sound all that rude.

"It's all nostalgia. I know it because I've dreamt it, just now. Fresh in my head. I forget, but when it happens, I suddenly remember. Oh, what a curse, there's hardly a possibility to prepare!"

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It was moonhigh and Frostbone braced against the cold. She was still shivering. She could not keep her mind off of what Sootleaf had said and even when she sat at the border, she felt time going by slowly as she settled her mind on those thoughts.

"Frostbone!" A voice called and she turned, seeing two cats approach.

"We've got bad news. You?" Coalspots whispered. "Something happened in Oakclan. It's bad, bad bad bad." He shook his head.

Cougarfang growled, "Not as bad as Venomclan I bet. Whatever happened there."

Frostbone told them Wolfstar's plan that he had told her a few sunrises ago. The two toms across the border snorted in disbelief.

"He's been lying to you." Cougarfang growled.

"Yeah." Coalspots nodded.

"So your information is null and void. As always." Cougarfang growled. "I cannot even commend you for trying!"

He never trusts me, even when I tell him the truth. We're compatible, aren't we? We're both deputies and we're both against Wolfstar! Or so I try to tell him...

Coalspots took a deep breath, "Anyway, we're ALL deputies now. Morningstar died and Bigflame, or Bigstar, is now leader.. and there was a revolt in Oakclan. Nettlestar and Burdockthorn were murdered by Birchleaf who is now Birchstar. And I am deputy." He shook his head.

"And worse of all." Cougarfang growled, "Birchstar's going to attempt to ally with Venomclan! Your horrible clan better not accept him, Frostbone. Do whatever you can to stop them from allying." His claws unsheathed, "And give us better information next time or we might as well call off the truce between us. And that means, next time I see you NEAR my clan, at the gathering or ANYWHERE, your pelt is getting shredded."

Chapter 12: New Allies and a Blood Bath

Wolfstar yowled, "All cats are going to this battle! All cats to Greenclan!"

Frostbone quivered, the prospect of their mission so horrid and vulgar she could barely hold in her protests, but she tried.

It was moons after Cougarfang got angry at her apparent lack of information, and Frostbone was now 13 moons. She was meant to become a warrior a moon ago, and it seemed strange to her that she had only now grown up.

Wolfstar had told her he decided to bring alive the generation old threat of: 'I will line this border with your blood!'

She had asked how, dreading the answer, and he said that he'd send warriors quickly into Greenclan camp to harvest the cat's fur, by tearing it off, and lining the rocks at the border with it.

"You cannot possibly manage to do that." She had countered.

"Really? All this training, and you still doubt me?" His eyes had glinted and he had looked out into the clearing and at the cats, "Look. All these warriors. All their ambitions in their eyes." He sighed.

"But why?" She had moaned.

"Because threats aren't enough."

Now they were sitting on top of the Tangled Willow together and she glanced over at him with dark blue eyes filled with suspicions, "Are you really going to ally with Oakclan?"

"Really, I already did." He laughed, "Birchstar, I like him. He's got a spirit I need and his clan's quite sinister in their own way. He even

mutilated some cats. If he can harm his cats physically yet they do not give any signs of rebellion, I find that impressive."

Both Coalspots and Cougarfang will be mad at me now. I cannot tell Wolfstar what to do, they should know that! She gave false support for her leader and nodded, "Mmmhm."

He did not buy it. "Ah look. The cats are filing out. Let's follow now."

They climbed down.

"Why are they leaving first?"

"Because I wanted to laze back a bit. This operation's all my brains and I have to find a way to make a grand entrance."

"I think what you're doing in itself is grand enough." She muttered.

"True. Well done." He grinned with all his teeth barred as they marched across the fields of sand and towards the Birdclan border. They would walk along it, only slightly trespassing but it was worth it to the Greenclan border, he had told them.

As they finally made it, in a massive line, they proceeded up the hill. A patrol of Greenclanners saw them with terrified eyes and ran, in different directions, vanishing.

Frostbone felt guilty beyond any comparison.

As they finally made it into the camp, cats yowled in fear and Frostbone saw the leader, Blackstar, looking with blazing brown eyes at Wolfstar, filled with hatred. Wolfstar yowled something but Frostbone was busy staring at the Greenclan deputy, the shy cat, who's name was Dappledsnow, and her name fit her. Suddenly the Greenclanner was thrown over by Harpytalon and Frostbone closed her eyes as red became her vision.

"Open them." Her leader instructed her, "And watch how powerful we are."

She did, slowly. She watched Greenclanners run in circles only to

become trapped by a Venomclanner and hunted for their furs. As their fur was donated, the Venomclanner would pile it, as instructed before they were told to leave camp, in groups near the outside of the camp.

"What is this, Wolfstar!?" Blackstar yowled, her curly fur on edge. Wolfstar told the Venomclanners to spare her until the end.

"This is power. Care to join?"

"Never!"

Frostbone swallowed and look behind her. She saw the nursery and suddenly her heart began to ache. She had hoped no cats would enter there, but she could not be sure. They were already raiding the apprentice den, the hiding apprentices streaming out with yowls of fear, their tails being caught and their bodies being dragged along to the Venomclanner's teeth and claws.

She saw one apprentice, however, flee behind his leader. A little bit later he ran from the camp. She prayed to whomever that he made it out safely.

"Why?" She yowled openly. Her voice was drowned out. She saw Skullcrush bashing an apprentice's skin off his body.

She sat down, feeling dizzy, "If there's a Starclan, save us now! If there's a Starclan, end this!"

A little while later, her vision was red. Redder. The reddest she'd ever seen it. It was because she was hyperventilating, and because there was so much blood. She looked around, turning her stiff head to view the pile of fur next to her. Blood oozed from the fabrics.

Suddenly thundering pawsteps sounded and a shocked yowl was heard.

Frostbone turned to see a cat. It was the new leader of Sandclan. She became leader a good few moons ago. It was Bigstar.

Her and Wolfstar spoke before she rushed to the now wounded Blackstar. Her warriors filed out and began attacking the

Venomclanners who hissed and used their pelts as well. However, Venomclan was outnumbered and Wolfstar knew they'd have to leave.

Frostbone avoided Cougarfang at all costs. She knew he'd target her, but perhaps if he'd see her claws and paws free of bloodstains he's refrain... Looking down at her paws she saw red stained on her silky fur. She had been stepping in the fallen blood, but she was no killer. She looked around frantically for the deputy she had once hoped she'd befriend, and could not see him near. She ran, breaking free of a clump of cats missing clumps of fur.

She saw the nursery, being threatened by Venomclanners. She whispered, "no.." But watched in relief as a red cat and a black and white cat fended off the warriors. She turned around to hear Wolfstar yowling.

They were going to retreat.

This is not strength. This is brutality! There's such thing as mental strength: Intelligence, emotional strength: relationships, and physical strength - that can be bravery! This is not brave nor heroic! This is evil! How is this strength?

But their job was done. They had the fur and they had the blood and they had the fear of the clans.

Chapter 13: The Battle that Started the War

It has only been several moons and Frostbone hasn't spoken with her two 'friends' since then. It was too embarrassing to confront them after what her Clan had done. What did she expect? She was so desperate for some friends that she promised to leak them information that she didn't have herself. Even if she were aware of when her Clan was going to attack GreenClan, there was no way she could have ever told Cougarfang in time. They had dates when they could meet, and that night was just not one of them. It was especially difficult to meet with Coalspots, whose border did not even reach the edge of VenomClan territory.
It did not matter. She figured Cougarfang had told Coalspots all about the Blood-Bath, as all the Clans would know about soon enough from simply seeing the borders of VenomClan, coated in blood and furs that hung off the rocks, or by the stench of blood that wafted from GreenClan's hilltop. If only Frostbone had some way to warn the two. But Wolfstar was clever, and did not share these types of plans with his deputy.

Not only with her 'friends', but more and more Frostbone found herself distanced from Redwillow and Sootleaf, the two crestfallen fellows who were busy with herbs in one of the few times they would have to use them. It was seldom ever that she could speak with them. Wolfstar barely let her an opening so she could anyway. And besides the battles, there were new warriors joining the ranks. Frostbone supposed this was so her leader can make winning battles easier, even against two Clans at once. Gingerscar and Bloodstone were now warriors, and there was even another Bloodpaw now.

But now in the present, Frostbone was sitting mournfully in the warrior's den, her moss placed in between Silentdawn, an anti-Wolfstar cat who has been long since shunned, and Addersmoke, an unstable and slightly violet cat who tries too hard to get on Wolfstar's good side, which has earned him a place on his bad side.

She was the only cat currently in the den, and this was good for her. She did not like to sulk with other warriors about and judging her with secretive glances.
Frostbone's eyes went to look to the Tangled Willow. If Wolfstar was not up there, he were to be in his den discussing Darkforest matters. And that he was.

Frostbone heard Skullcrush's voice, barking at an apprentice named Dogpaw who wasn't even beneath his mentor-ship. The young she-cat snapped back at him, earning her a rake across her cheek. Her defiant dark eyes went darker then.
Bloodpaw, her den-mate, had a cruel mentor named Strongheart. The dark brown tom, who was decorated with many scars, would punish Bloodpaw thrice the amount of Dogpaw's punishments. Frostbone remembered her own time as an apprentice and felt almost guilty for having such a merciful and kind mentor. It seems that, after all of Wolfstar's and Russetstar's arguing, that the former had finally got his way.

And speaking of the former, Wolfstar had slunk from his den. He was ascending the Tangled Willow, muscles rippling and eyes glinting as they did. He perched himself on top of the mighty tree, and yowled. Frostbone knew she had to join him, so she hauled herself from her den with a sigh and climbed up the willow from the back. Joining him by his side, but beneath his shadow, she heard him and his yowl:

"We will be going into SandClan territory. We will see what they can do when they find us sitting there, eating their prey and frolicking in their grass. This will be a test to see how our competition takes it." He let his warriors drink in his words and he went on, "Of course, do not be afraid to play with your prey-- the warriors, I mean. Take this intrusion as punishment to SandClan for interfering with our project in GreenClan."

Frostbone's heart began racing in her chest, thump-thumping relentlessly. *They'll kill us all if they find us in their territory*, she thought. *And Cougarfang will kill me, personally.*
Cats of VenomClan obviously did not care. They cheered anyway, all without doubt in their hearts that they could defeat the rival Clan.

"They're no match for us!" Skullcrush yowled violently.
"We'll eat all their prey until none is left!" Thundereyes roared.
"They'll not know *what* to do!" Strongheart smirked.
"Good idea, Wolfstar!" Addersmoke yowled.

Everyone got ready by gathering their apprentices or eating excessively, or sometimes requesting of Sootleaf strengthening herbs although this was rare and a sign of weakness in VenomClan. Cats continued their cheering while Frostbone shook her head, ashamed of everyone although she expected nothing less. They gathered behind Wolfstar and left the camp in a line, cats chattering endlessly about how excited they were to spill blood and put SandClan in their place for helping their neighbours.

Even Redwillow was forced to come, maybe so Wolfstar could watch him fail or even die in battle, dragging his paws and lacking behind the other warriors. Frostbone caught up with him, hissed in his ear, "Look what he's doing! This atrocity. What's with all these battles?"
He nodded, kept his eyes ahead, "Hopefully this is the day we all die."
It won't be. No matter what, this has to work. Wolfstar did *consult the Darkforest, after all.*
The sands of VenomClan eventually turned to soft grass as they passed the border. Frostbone was shaking with nerves while the rest of her clanmates were as calm as apprentices padding out to training.

Everyone reached SandClan's pond, either throwing themselves onto the soft grass or preparing for a hunt. It was several moments of peace, and these VenomClanners acted in enemy territory as they would in their own. Warriors splashed each other with the water from the pond, but never daring to swim, and sunned on the rocks. Some cats ventured deeper into the wooded areas only to come back with hare or starling in their jaws. The warriors acted so calm, so polite and so childish in enemy territory that it sickened Frostbone to her stomach. "How dare they?" she muttered. *How dare these intruders act so nonchalant on their death-day?*

"Because it's fun. Come on, loosen up. You're as young as I am! Our Clan is strong enough to do this and not get in trouble. Why don't

you just be proud of your Clan for once?" Skullcrush's hiss in her ear came as unwanted as a bee's buzzing.

She turned around, seeing both him and Gingerscar. Gingerscar was muscular now, and the 'scar suffix actually suited her, unlike most of the suffixes of the other warriors. She had scars on the back of her head and especially on her ears, probably from training more than anything else.
Frostbone sneered at the two, "You have no morals."
Although she did feel sleepy and she has been eyeing the rocks near the pond with envy, especially as other warriors settled themselves comfortably on the stone, she did hold back her temptations and keep her ground.
"What's that? What's a moral?" Gingerscar snickered.

Frostbone turned away. She let the two slink off and join in with the rest, feasting on prey that wasn't rightfully theirs. Frostbone saw Wolfstar, laying on his flank and having warriors surround him as if he were some comfortable monarch being aided, nay guarded, by loyal warriors who did not dare anyone threaten any hair on his head.

Suddenly a yowl interrupted everything, and everything happy drained from the scene. It was Bigstar, across the clearing, with her deputy tall at her flank. Frostbone's heart palpitated so quick and hard, she could hear it drumming. She quickly fled into the shadows, hiding behind a tree trunk and peering out at everything. The leaders were yowling back and forth and before Frostbone was even given a chance to turn around, pawsteps were thudding and cats were getting up from their relaxed positions to prepare for the attack.

There were six parts of this battle in total. Documented, it was perhaps the longest battle in the Land's history. Perhaps not the largest, because Clans were bigger in member-count back then, but most likely the longest and largest in one piece of territory ever. The first part was SandClan against VenomClan. It lasted a day.

Throughout that day, Frostbone clashed against Cougarfang. The two performed a deadly tango, claw-to-claw and tooth-to-tooth.
"How dare you, pathetic thing, let your Clan invade our territory?"

Cougarfang growled, pinning Frostbone by her shoulder-blades. He lowered his maw, growled deeper into her ear, "You could have warned me! You must have known, you must have been planning this for moons. You pathetic mouse. What are you so afraid of? You're deputy of the most powerful Clan."
Frostbone turned, thrashed and kicked him off into a rock, "I didn't know! I swear--"

"You're deputy!" He leapt off the rock but Frostbone was running. "That's right, run!" His voice trailed after her.

The second part was not the second day, it was the third. It was two days that only the two Clans were clashing, back and forth, relentless. In the third part, BirdClan was brought for SandClan's aid. Each Clan had a medicinal base. After BirdClan's arrival, VenomClan was failing. Cats, including Frostbone, were stuck in the medicinal den getting their wounds treated by an exhausted and exasperated Sootleaf.

"They brought BirdClan!? The cowards!" Harpyfang hissed past cobwebs that were being wrapped around his chest, smothering his jaw.
"We can play that game!" Skeletonjaw hissed. Her white pelt was stained a deep crimson.
"Should we, though?" Silentdawn murmured. "We've been fighting longer than anticipated... I lament fighting, and for this *long*..."

They did, to Frostbone's shame. The third part of the battle, and it was two Clans against two. Allegiance against allegiance.

Frostbone looked to Coalspots who looked to her.
"I will not fight SandClan or BirdClan." He told her, "You should do the same."

"*Your* leader's too busy with *mine* who watches me *constantly*. You can choose to not fight them, but I can't." Frostbone answered curtly, avoiding the tom's blue gaze.

"What a poor excuse." Coalspots murmured darkly, getting up and running to meet Cougarfang.

I am not the bad guy because I work underneath one.

The last three parts of the battle came too quick to notice, as the rest of the Clans joined the battle out of either aid or the want for revenge.
GreenClan joined VenomClan and OakClan.
Blackstar stood next to Wolfstar, but still in his shadow. "I will fight with you." She told him in a strong voice.

"Good. You are clever."
"Despite the fact you skinned my warriors for your little play." She spat at his paws yet he did not flinch.

Frostbone glanced at Blackstar's deputy, Snowdapple. She was a shy cat, but certainly smart. One could see in her eyes that she was smart. Her eyes had that twinkle in them.

"I apologize for that, but you should've allied us sooner." Wolfstar's apology was not sincere.

The three leaders walked and talked and Snowdapple stared at Frostbone with mistrust before bounding away and disappearing into the battle.

"Everyone hates me." Frostbone spoke aloud.

"Not true." Redwillow came to her, limping. His leg looked as if it had been bitten, but he had no other wounds. "Not everyone. We're just alone, but alone together."

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Frostbone was battling Cougarfang now. She tried to apologize but he was not accepting, no matter what she said.
He panted, "My daughter." He growled through pants, "Is dead because of your Clan."
Frostbone felt her heart sputter, "What? You had a kit? I never knew you had a famil-"

"I have a family, unlike you, heartless beast!" He raked her cheek and she stepped back in surprise. She felt her chest ache and head whirl. *He had a family? And my Clan's responsible for killing his kit?*

Of course it was, and that was a no-brainer. VenomClan has been tearing apart families since families began.

He lunged at her, pinning her, raking her belly mercilessly and she yowled and threw him off, slashing his shoulder clean open. He growled, kicking her violently into the water that gulped her greedily into his depths.
Panicking, her head slowly whirring through the water in an attempt to see the surface, she hauled herself to her paws. She felt cold as she resurfaced, and as she burst from the water, so did her claws. Her claws gripped around Cougarfang's neck, strangling him tightly but careful not to plunge her claws into soft skin.
I am not bad. Quit pinning this all on me and notice Wolfstar! Shut up, shut up, shut up, die, die, die already you buffoon! I'm sick of you and your rhetoric!

She saw as his eyes bugged and his mouth opened to try and breath, his teeth shining. Seeing what she was doing, she threw him aside and stormed away. She turned back once, saw him up and able, and ran.

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The last part of the battle was when Wolfstar lost. He didn't really lose, Frostbone knew, but to the other Clans it gave them false hope. Wolfstar and Bigstar brawled on the backdrop of a bloody-red sunset, and everything was so melodramatic it almost seemed contrived. It made almost every cat stop to watch Wolfstar's defeat. It wasn't really a defeat if both leaders lost a life, but at least the other Clans grew hopeful in seeing that it was possible to defeat Wolfstar, even if for a few moments.

Frostbone herself was not over, after his battle was done. She *would* gain Cougarfang's trust, and *would* made sure Wolfstar died. If not by her claws, then by somebody else's.
Cats have died in this battle.
And they have not died in vain. They will see the day Wolfstar falls, from StarClan. Even if Frostbone might already have joined them at that time.

Chapter 14: Calm Before the Storm

The weather was pleasantly warm. The grass in SandClan territory was allegedly still stained red, and VenomClanners knew for sure that the rocks on their border were. For an aftermath, the weather was clement, and oddly placid-- Frostbone thought it to be inappropriate. There ought to be a gentle rain in mourning for all those who have died.

Of course, the deputy was reflecting on the weather outside from inside Wolfstar's den. The sun was setting, setting the walls a dull pink, and the deputy was mewing, "Why'd you have to enter SandClan's territory anyway? We didn't gain anything from it."

"That was so long ago. Three moons ago. Why complain?"
"It was immoral." She argued.
"I did it to prove a point. Dear Frostbone, we gained much from it. You're too naive to understand how useful it is to test the waters." His eyes glinted in the darkness, reminding his deputy of a potent persuasion, hidden behind a candid, monstrous guise.

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The next sunrise, Frostbone was on the Tangled Willow. She had just finished assigning patrols, empty minded as usual, waiting until Wolfstar exited his den-- it was sun-high, after all. Oddly enough, no warriors seemed to mind or notice his absence.
Despite him being gone, his influence was still heavy in camp. Everyone remembered The Great Battle, as it was named; the longest and largest Frostbone has ever heard of.

The effects were evident during the last gathering Frostbone attended. Every warrior was separated by Clan, huddled next to one another and distrustfully eyeing the VenomClanners and OakClanners who mingled together. Even GreenClan was independent again, terminating their alliance soon after the battle

and giving Wolfstar the temporary idea of invading them the night after.

Frostbone decided to climb down from the Tangled Willow and onto the warm sand. She spotted Redwillow and approached, nodding to Silentdawn who was nearby, and to her past mentor as she grew near.

"Want us to go on a patrol or something?" Silentdawn asked, biting into a piece of vole.
"No, I'm just here to talk to Redwillow." The deputy mewed.
Silentdawn got up, "I'll go then." She mewed curtly before leaving.
Frostbone watched her leave and then sat down in front of Redwillow who looked tired.

"I was on morning patrol and I'm due for the sun-high patrol." He muttered.
"I'll come with you for the sun-high patrol! Who leads that, again?"
She thought back to whom she assigned. It seemed so long ago, and she usually assigns random cats to random patrols anyway.

"Icemarrow."

"Oh." She lashed her tail across the sand, "I'm sorry, I just thought'd be nice for him to leave camp for a bit." She purred.

He purred as well, despite looking uncomfortable.

Icemarrow's voice hissed from across the clearing, "Patrol! Gather, now!"

Frostbone and Redwillow slowly collected next to him alongside Soaringclaw and Strongheart.
Icemarrow stared at Frostbone. "Yes, my deputy?" He asked in a mockingly respectful tone. "What is it you need?"
"I am coming on the patrol." She told him.

"Oh, as a test to see how I lead one?" He cooed. The other two warriors chuckled.
"No. I just need some time outside of camp." She snapped. "I can't stay here all day long, assigning patrols one after another. I need to

contribute to the Clan, too."

He looked away from her, icy eyes sour. He muttered something, "Rather you never did *anything,* like Longscar..." Before leading the cats from camp.

They were led to a couple of rocks. These rocks weren't red, for no battles have taken place here. It was a corner of land that was dark from the shadows of RockClan mountains close by, surrounded by rocks that were grey in colour. In fact, all VenomClan rocks are grey. Grey and tan were the colours of their territory. There wasn't much else.

Frostbone scented the air. The scent of RockClan was faint, as was expected, from their scent being blown from across the border. She instead focused on the scent of mouse that was noticeable nearby. She crouched into the sand. Camouflage did not matter out near the rocks. It never did. VenomClanners caught prey based off of speed and accuracy.

She leapt at the mouse stationed just outside a rock crevice and landed on it before it had a chance to duck back under the rock. She lifted it in her jaws and looked for the others. Redwillow was sleeping on a rock. He had already caught a vole and he was now resting.

"Tired from the morning patrol?"

"Tired of everything." He answered without opening his eyes, "The other sunrise, Icemarrow made Bloodpaw train on me." He rolled over, eyes still shut, to show her the scratch marks on his belly. He sighed, "And Sootleaf keeps telling me of his dreams. There's something coming. Something coming soon."

"What is it?" Frostbone padded next to the rock and listened close. *Are we going to die? Is this finally the end?*

"In Leaf-bare. Sickness and plague and death and blood, yet we are all fine."

At the beginning of the sentence Frostbone felt excited, but near the

end her hopes sank. "Oh."

He opened his eyes and looked straight into hers, "But what are we to do?" His glistening amber stare gazed into her dark blue with a heavy seriousness. "Long ago, in GreenClan, the same was practiced there. A slavery of sorts. Cats being kept for whatever the strong leader wanted. There was nothing they could do but die and release themselves into StarClan. But where is StarClan here?"

Frostbone's heart beat fast. "I don't think StarClan watches over us because they know there is absolutely nothing they can do to stop whatever will happen."

Redwillow nodded his head against the rock as he sighed, "The future is set."

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Frostbone dropped her prey into the pile. The pile was placed conveniently for where she was about to go next. She swerved from the fresh-kill pile propped against a stone cave and went into the cave's entrance.

"Sootleaf!" She ran to him and sat down, lost out of her mind.

He turned around and stared at her with twin moon eyes. "What is it?" He whispered to her. His claws sank into the sand, "Another battle? I should of figured the chance VenomClan got to start the leaf-bare with a bang was to start another battle."

"No! Is there something coming in Leaf-bare though? Redwillow said you dreamt of something horrific." She was panicking. *How would Cougarfang and Coalspots like me now? How would they? How would they see me when my clan dictates over them and I stand next to the oppressor?*

He nodded slowly, "It's true." He looked longingly outside of the den and at the grey sky.

Suddenly a snowflake drifted from the sky and fell at his paws.

Chapter 15: The Dead of Winter

Warning: Contains spoilers for Sandclan's Destiny Book 2: The Faded Stars

With one snowflake came more, carrying over an entire Leaf-bare. Wolfstar's plan was to take the warriors from other clans into his camp and keep them there. Cats who ally live alongside him and the ones who don't die slow. Frostbone felt sick to the pits of her stomach.

It was a merciless midnight as the cats of Venomclan stealthily snuck into Sandclan territory. They had already dropped off the cats from Birdclan at their camp, and Sandclan was next. Oakclan was helping them with their dastardly deed.

Frostbone padded next to Coalspots. "It's not fair." She whispered to him, "Why does Cougarfang trust you but not me when both our clans are evil?"

The tall white and black tom whispered over to her as they padded through rich fields now cold and frosted, "Because Cougarfang and I go back. Way back. I saved his life, he owes me."

Frostbone hissed between her teeth, mist forming from her breath in a swirling cloud.

They reached Sandclan camp.

"What are you going to do about Cougarfang, then?" She asked him sourly.

"Carry him gentle. You'll help me." They snuck into the warrior's den with the rest of the cats, oddly silent despite the fact there were lots of them crowding in one area. Leaf-bare nights were always oddly quiet though. Their paws crunched the frosted grass softly as they bit into the scruffs and tails of the cats. As the cat's eyes burst open and their jaws did the same, another cat would come to cover

up their face to muffle their yowl.

They saw Cougarfang, curled up besides his littermate.

His littermate.

Frostbone remembered her specifically from the battle. Longscar fought her for the most part, and she had come out of as a grievance. Her ears were gone but they were gone neatly, leaving behind a smooth head. One eye was gone, leaving only the one surrounded in black fur, giving her a grim look.

Her tail was also gone, right from the base. It would be particularly difficult to carry her. Coalspots hooked Cougarfang's scruff and Frostbone bit into his tail. An Oakclanner named Redcloud muffled him with a violent smirk on her face that caused both Coalspots and Frostbone to glance at one another in worry of the sadistic she-cat.

They carried him with some difficulty along. They brought him to other cats, and Cougarfang's yellow eyes were rolling in his head crazily, trying to assess the situation but the cats were coated in shadows. The only thing he could do was smell the cat who was covering his mouth and nose.

Bigstar was a problem. She needed Wolfstar and other naturally tall cats to carry her. When they did, she thrashed until more paws had to clamp her nose and mouth. The lack of air soon made her woozy and weak until she surrendered and they proceeded to carry her away.

The kits were the easiest, but the queens, in seeing their kits being taken away, grew to a panic. The golden she-cat queen leapt forward but was knocked down and carried as well.

Coalspots and Cougarfang went alongside their leaders.

"To Rockclan now." Wolfstar growled, his voice as quiet as the wind, but just as cold.

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The camp was packed with confused cats, some sleeping and some

awake and yowling in protest.

"When the sun rises, you will choose your alliances! You can either choose death, or independence, or live and depend on me, your true leader!" Wolfstar's voice boomed.

Frostbone and Coalspots sat next to him and Birchstar.

Soon the sun did rise, and alliances were made.

Frostbone watched as Blackstar again allied with Venomclan, and she saw Wolfstar roll his eyes but nobody else seemed to. He welcomed her back. Blizzardstar denied allyship with Wolfstar, but her clan seemed to disagree. They piled her and attacked her, until one cat rose up, a cat named Tigerleap, who promised loyalty to Wolfstar. The rest of Rockclan followed.

Coalspots stirred besides her, "This is wrong. It happened all so quick, surely it'd fall quick as well. Certainly, with leaders such as these. Remember The Great Battle?"

Frostbone nodded, but she wasn't so sure.

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Moons went by. Sickness struck, as Sootleaf had promised. Death came, as Sootleaf had dreamt of. Blood ofttimes stained the snow a deep red. She noticed as Skullcrush trained against enemy apprentices, and Bloodpaw did the same. She watched as Bloodpaw battered an innocent black she-cat from Sandclan, an apprentice, like him. Frostbone looked away.

She was in the warrior's den, the stone she sat on cold and the moss hard. Guards circled all around, guards from Greenclan and Oakclan and Rockclan. They made sure no cat ran away. A moon before, one cat did, but everyone just figured her to be dead and brushed it off.

Frostbone was well-fed. More cats to hunt for one clan meant more prey. It was four clans hunting for two clans, the rest of the cats were starved.

Frostbone saw Cougarfang looking thin, every detail of his bones apparent through his now thin pelt. He was huddled shivering in a group with his clan, his usually determined eyes still containing only some of it's luster.

"Frostbone." She heard a voice. She turned around to see Coalspots. She was wishing for Redwillow instead. Redwillow wasn't so well-fed, other Venomclanners saw to that. They sometimes teased him for being weaker, teased him for doubting Wolfstar. They would say things like: "Look at us now, thriving in the middle of leaf-bare! This is what happens when you doubt Wolfstar- you get surprised. You get proven wrong."

Or: "Weakling! Look at us now. Strong. But not you, you're no true Venomclanner!"

But it was instead Coalspots.

Frostbone looked up, "What."

He beckoned her to follow him by flicking his tail. He went, his lean and well-fed muscles rolling as he did.

She followed, leaping down and into the cold snow, her paws immediately becoming chill and numb. She trudged through it, some parts of it reeking of blood and stained a nasty red, too. She cringed her nose as he led her behind the Tangled Willow and near the sheer stone wall that lay behind their camp a good few tree-lengths away.

Cougarfang was there as well now, sitting like a skeleton with fur hanging on him desperately. He looked angry at them both.

"I am sorry." He apologized, quietly. "I do understand you are both... in this... with me. In this... rebellion of sorts."

"Not a successful one." Coalspots concluded, "And that needs to change. Umm." He frowned, his usually friendly blue eyes now thoughtful. They darkened and he spoke, "There's nothing much we can do." He looked away.

Frostbone lashed her tail, "Venomclan's medicine cat is a good soul.

He's had dreams of this. He's had dreams of everything that's about to come. Can we possibly prevent it?"

"No." Cougarfang looked up. "The future is set."

Chapter 16: The Darkforest

Wolfstar made her come to the Darkforest again. The snow was thicker on the sand in the camp now, the days colder but slowly getting longer. The Darkforest never changed one bit. It was always musky and rank, with the stench of fungi thick in the air like a perfume. It was always night as well; the moon always a harvest moon, sometimes red, but always hanging low in the bald trees.

A grey and scarred cat padded up, yellow eyes piercing the black fog, "Wolfstar." he greeted. He looked to Frostbone and scanned her, "Leave her here. She can speak with the other Darkforest cats. We must talk. You, me, Deathblaze, alone."

Wolfstar nodded and the two turned around and vanished, melting into the shadows.

The deputy was then left alone in a clearing of skeletal ferns with a fallen branch from some tree, eaten away by maggots that still writhed on the wood.

She sat down, carefully inspecting the ground behind her before doing so. She didn't want to sit on a sharp bone or a secreting insect. As she sat down, a rustling was heard behind her.

She swung her head around, eyes widening as she saw a cat emerge from the darkness. A washed out ginger cat, not even ginger, with many scars greeted her, "Hello, Frostbone. I'm sorry about Wolfstar." She rolled her orange eyes. Her eyes matched the harvest moon above her head.

Frostbone narrowed her eyes, "Who are you?" She hoped the she-cat would not feel offended in her not knowing.

"Scarstar. An old leader of VenomClan." She sat down, her long tail wrapping around her paws like a serpent.

Another cat came from the shadows, hissing, "Scarstar, quit

associating yourself with the visitor! We have to TRAIN. We're getting live ones soon for the same purpose. She isn't here to join us."

Frostbone looked to the next cat. They were a musty-smelling, torn up, dark grey tom with deep, green eyes.

"Cavestone!" Scarstar hissed. "I'll train when I'm ready."

"The others are waiting." He argued, throwing his head back dramatically to the ferns beyond.

Scarstar looked to Frostbone with twinkling mischievous eyes, "Want to come? You should come, follow me. Wolfstar won't care. You don't need a strong stomach to watch our training- you see it all the time in your camp anyway. Except here we're much more professional, and much better fighters than your clan's apprentices." The scarred leader looked to Cavestone.

He nodded, "Fine."

Frostbone padded into a clearing of seemingly countless cats- it was a big clearing as well. Some of the cats she could swore fit the description of old VenomClan tales of violent warriors. They probably were them.

Scarstar lashed her tail at them as Cavestone took his place with a black she-cat, hunched over a rat.

"This is us. Wolfstar's secret little Clan. We don't have a Clan name, nor do we all adore him. Most do, don't get me wrong, and there's not enough for a revolt but." She heaved a sigh, "I don't like him."

"Me neither." Frostbone blurted. *I have finally found someone else who doesn't like him but is forced to serve him!*

"Oh, I know." She padded to a bone and kicked it with a fore-paw.

Frostbone went next to her, "Would Wolfstar get... mad at you for saying that?"

"We speak our minds here. We ARE old after all. We've been

condemned here for moons, countless moons, and we have no way of keeping track of time. We might as well not be enslaved any more."

Frostbone understood, for the most part. *I cannot believe this. The Clans have no chance. Scarstar at least may not fight for Wolfstar in the long-run. Why am I already thinking about a long-run? This certainly cannot work. StarClan won't let it.*

Who am I kidding? StarClan doesn't watch over us anymore.

She sat down and her rump landed on something unpleasant. It oozed and she quickly stood, gasping. She scrunched up her nose.

"Ah, a rat. Someone was going to eat that." Scarstar chuckled.

"Yeah. Me." A cat strode forward, seemingly from the shadows beyond the clearing. It was strange that way.

Why did I think it would all make sense? Me being deputy still doesn't make sense to me.

The cat stared DOWN at Frostbone with a seething gaze. "Now I'm going to have to catch a new one."

Frostbone swallowed but Scarstar intervened, "Blackmuzzle, calm down. You've been here longer than most of us, you can easily hunt another rat. You've been doing so for MOONS. I think moons."

The large black tom had muscles that were bulky and round, and his muzzle was indeed notable. His face looked like a blanket of black, and the only thing visible were his beady slime-green eyes and his shimmering fangs. "I know." He spoke, bloody breath wafting to Frostbone who was used to the smell enough to not flinch or recoil from it. "That's all there is to eat." He turned his head and spat, revealing a shredded ear.

He then left. Scarstar turned around, "I guess I'll have to train." She told Frostbone, "If I were you, I'd stay well out of the way. Training here isn't so simple."

"Why're you training? Or is that secret..." She backed up from the

old leader.

"Why are we trai- Wolfstar brings you here yet you know absolutely nothing of his intentions?" Scarstar sounded aghast. She backed up as well, swinging her head dramatically, "He is a mouse-brain as I had thought!"

"Complaining again, Scarstar, are we?" Another cat padded up. They were a smaller cat, they perhaps died as an apprentice. They sounded wise if not very old.

Scarstar turned around, looking down at the small brown tabby she-cat. The smaller cat had a ripped up muzzle-not fresh. "You were never loyal, huh. Jealous, huh?"

"I could say the same of you. You wish you were in that inner circle, huh? Well, you're too young, Swiftclaw." Scarstar snorted, lifting her head.

"I'm older than you!" She hissed, claws unsheathing. Her yellow eyes glinted and she leapt at Scarstar, biting onto her scruff and swinging so hard that the bigger cat slipped and fell over into the rank grass.

I wonder if she's from the same time-period as Blackmuzzle, whatever time that would be.

"Should've trained." The younger cat ripped a piece of her scruff before bouncing off. Scarstar got up.

She took a deep breath, "Swiftclaw, for a young apprentice, you sure act like a cocky leader. You act like Wolfstar himself."

"Why thank you!"

You should be ashamed. How did an apprentice get into the Darkforest anyway?

"You're just sore because you were once a GreenClanner, and GreenClanners are good-for-nothings because they don't have anything they're good at at all!" Scarstar swung her claws boredly at Swiftclaw who attempted a dodge, but the leader saw that coming

and whipped her entire body in front of the apprentice and thwacked her aside and into the ground. She lay a paw on her shoulder and sank her claws in, one by one. "Now give me a reason why I shouldn't just tear this shoulder's skin right off."

"Get shredded.." Swiftclaw muttered through clenched teeth.

Scarstar let her go. She turned to Frostbone who had been watching with a fast beating heart. "What was that?" She asked the leader, stepping back once again. She did not want anyone to snap on her like that and rip open a scar anywhere on her, for the time being, unscathed pelt.

The scarred she-cat dipped her head in apology, "The warriors here think that because they're older than some, they should be in the... uh, inner circle. The harder you train, the harder you are, the harder you act, the harder you are to get to, the easier it is to enter the inner-circle. Of course, I'd never try." She lifted her head to stare at the harvest moon. "And it's mostly because I'm not apart of Wolfstar's plan... Really. I'm not into his whole agenda. I'm not evil like him.

"But sometimes I wonder why I'm here, in the Darkforest. What did I do again? It's been so long... That's right, I remember. Who cares. Cats change after a while. Everyone should know that. StarClanners are ignorant to this. Why do good cats like myself and few others here get such sour treatment by everyone? And why do such sour cats like Wolfstar, Deathblaze, Greenstar and most of the rest get such good treatment by everyone?"

She turned to Frostbone to look at her with harvest-moon eyes. "Do you understand?"

Chapter 17: Coldwarning Comes

Warning: Contains spoilers for Sandclan's Destiny Book 2: The Faded Stars.

The afternoon was painted in monochrome, and it only got darker. The sky was crowded with angry clouds, overlapping one another and painting a war in the sky, a battle of clouds struggling for space. It only made things darker as the sun began to vanish completely over the nearly black horizon.
Currently, prisoners were being piled into the Tangled Willow, yowls dissonant and loud rising from the allegedly cursed tree. It really fit the mood.
The prisoners were meant to die, one at a time, every sunset.

Well it was that time once again, like clockwork sundown came and paced gruelingly slow before night came and day again, speeding on by until sunset. And repeat.
Frostbone bit into a cat's scruff, dreading this moment as she threw them onto the sand. He was almost unrecognizable, but she knew him from BirdClan. He was an older cat.

"Well. Time to die, I guess." Frostbone lifted him by his scruff, and worked alongside whom she didn't think she'd ever have to rely on: Skullcrush. The VenomClan warrior lifted him by the tail.
And as quick as killing prey, the duty was done.
But not without leaving a chilling echo.

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After a while, the winds became colder and numbing. Frostbone and Skullcrush were entrusting to kill every sunset, but if not them, then some random guards would gladly take the duty to impress and light up the eyes of the ever-watching Wolfstar. It was like clockwork.

However, there was one fateful night. Frostbone knew the cats in the willow were planning something, but she figured after three nights they had lost hope. But nope- they revolted; they had *outsmarted* Wolfstar. *Or had they?*

Wolfstar seemed too smart to fall for such trifling things. But as plain as day, cats streamed from the Tangled Willow with a newfound energy- and newfound friends to accompany them. Yowls split the cold air, an ear-splitting, spine-tingling noise for a night that could summon the same shivers.
Frostbone at that moment was in the dark warrior's den. She was awake, like most other cats in the camp. VenomClanners didn't seem to sleep when there was just *so much to do.*

Frostbone that night had spoken to Wolfstar. He stayed up the entire night, consulting the Darkforest. "I knew they were going to attempt an escape. I'll still try my half-hardest to prevent them." That gave her the idea he thought they wouldn't manage. "But whatever they think, let them think it. Trick them into thinking they have a stronger will. Whatever happens, I've secretly won." And that's what made her think that he was a clever and sly cat.

And he is, Frostbone thought as the SandClanners and BirdClanners rose up against the rest, along with their new recruits.
But the VenomClan deputy was swelled with joy. *Finally they've come! It's like they're saving me and me alone. If only that would happen instead. I don't want to kill any longer!*

Frostbone now had scrambled on top of the Tangled Willow, half looking for Wolfstar and the other leaders, and half hiding from angry claws that would definitely try and shred her pelt for all she has done and all she has been forced to do. But she couldn't stay on top of here forever; they'd see her, they'd come for her, throw her off... plus she had to fight. She had to fight for *some* side eventually! She slid down, hid in the shadows. She began to grow paranoid, wondering what would possibly happen if Wolfstar saw her *cowering. He'd have an ear of mine.*

She looked around for an opponent of either side who maybe wouldn't recognize her face before it was too late and they were already fleeing away from her. But all the opponents she either

decided were 'too strong' or 'too big' for her to take on.
She was slinking along the Tangled Willow for a while until she found her friend sat in its shadow. She approached him, "A-anyone know what's going on, Coalspots?" She was so excited and anxious, her breath came in short stutters. She pretended she did not know anything.

I know it's a rebellion. I know.

Coalspots flicked his tail, "Stay here. Do not move one bit. If someone attacks you, fend them off the best you can, although I don't think anyone will. I'm finding Cougarfang." He went off, dissapearing between two hissing and spitting cats.

Frostbone waited, anxious. Her eyes grazed the clearing, searching and looking for familiar faces or pelts. Suddenly two shapes approached her, sat, then shoved themselves and her back further into the darkness beneath the Tangled Willow.
"What's going on?" Frostbone hissed.

Cougarfang answered, "We're taking Wolfstar down, once and for all. Hopefully. 'Won't be the last time we fight, I have a feeling." Then suddenly his yellow eyes snapped towards her, "Frostbone." He looked over at her with bright and lively eyes of golden fire, "Wish to help us?"
For once, his eyes held no vice against her. They were inviting, warm flames; not hot ones you'd want to avoid.

"I don't know... If Wolfstar saw me helping... he might have my life twice, I think."

Cougarfang growled, "Fine, be that way!"
But Coalspot's tail rested on his friend's shoulder to calm him, and answered for Cougarfang, "That's fine Frostbone. Just don't... kill anything."

She wouldn't.
She didn't.

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The battle had changed so suddenly. For a long time, cats fought normally; groups of warriors hissing and slashing at one another to spill as much blood as possible and prove themselves beneath the stars and gain their freedom- or their authority.
Now the cats came to see this marvel- a young SandClanner she-cat attempting to kill the leader of OakClan.

She wandered around the group, speculating the scene. Cats loyal to VenomClan hissed and threw harmful words and slang at the SandClanner battling their leader, making Frostbone remember the words thrown at her by Skullcrush when they were apprentices- and still the words he throws at her behind her back. She also remembered the words slung at Redwillow for being passive. Frostbone narrowed her dark eyes- she felt sympathy.

But she had an agenda, and she could not spend the entire rest of the night gawking. She put on an apathetic mask and escaped from the group, her paws leading her swift towards Wolfstar's den.
He was in there, and he wasn't sleeping. He was awake, and in reality. Frostbone's heart beat fast, because the cat who lay beneath his paws was Bigstar, leader of SandClan.
Suddenly Frostbone felt a painful nostalgia. Instead of Bigstar she saw Russetstar. Frostbone ran in again, her shadow on the wall, then left.

"No. Wolfstar'd *kill* me. StarClan, if you're listening..." She began, "And you're not... Russetstar especially- I'm *sorry*. I know you'd want me to not let Bigstar end up like you, but... I can't." She shook her head and collapsed outside the den, onto her hunches.

If I knew Wolfstar'd be busy, and I should've joined Coalspots and Cougarfang. What kind of friend am I? I have few friends to begin with, and I cannot even keep most of them! Sootleaf's probably trying desperately to contact StarClan and Redwillow has probably escaped the camp for his own sake, and what am I doing? Is Redwillow a coward for leaving during a fight or am I a pathetic coward for not knowing who to fight for!?

Frostbone decided what to do.
"Wolfstar?" Her voice echoed across his den.
Wolfstar turned calmly, "Look," he mewed gently, "this must be so

familiar for you."

Frostbone seethed, her apathetic face splitting and her straight mouth cracking, quivering in anger and quaking in mild fear. All these things she tried so hard to keep him from seeing, "Yes. But are you going to kill her? Like, until she's in StarClan? Forever?"

"No, dear deputy. That's too easy. This way's more fun." he narrowed his eyes, his gaze piercing right into her own. He read her quickly before mewing, "I need to spread the fear, no? However, I will take this advantage to kill her again. But I fear the next time she awakes she will be stronger, and much more aware of what's going on."

Good. "So what's your plan?"

"What's the matter?" He dashed a paw across his mouth, smearing away the stain. His eyes were clouded with something Frostbone could not place. Probably dark mischief. "You're scared?" He laughed, as if it were the funniest thing in the world. He lifted his head and let his shadow on the wall twist and writhe. "You're not getting this through your *head!"* His head snapped back down and despite all this manic movement, his fur was flat and his eyes were calm. His entire vibe was calm, relaxed. "The power *you* have as *my* deputy. Of course *Birchstar's* really my deputy..."
He cocked his head at her, "You'd have more power than you would with your false friends, Cougarfang and Coalspots."

"How did you kno-"

"I am no mouse-brain. I have the eyes of the Darkforest on my side, and they see much more than StarClan."
Frostbone's eyes widened. She feared that if she were to glance aside, or anywhere away from Wolfstar's eyes, that she would see the eyes of his darker companions.

"Yes," Wolfstar chuckled, "They see. Now, Frostbone, follow me." and he turned, lashing his tail, and Frostbone had no other choice than to follow with.

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The two arrived in Sootleaf's den, where he sat alone. Usually there were other medicine cats with him, but this time he was in complete isolation, facing away from the entrance, but with an ear flicking.
"What is it?" he directed his voice sternly at Wolfstar, "What do you want? Wounded? I doubt so. Even when you are, you're too stubborn to ask for aid."
Wolfstar shoved the smaller tom out of the way with a heavy shoulder.

"Where're your deathberries?" Wolfstar ordered.

Frostbone tilted her head, "*Deathberries!?* Sootleaf..." *Why would he have deathberries? Who is he planning to kill?*

Sootleaf turned his head over his shoulder, glaring with enormous white eyes, "I don't know if Wolfstar told you this, but he instructed I collect for him deathberries just in case. This was moons ago. And how could I deny my leader's orders?" he glanced quickly at Wolfstar before turning away and searching for the berries.

Frostbone nodded, turning to glare at her leader. She saw his silhouette's paw scoop up something Sootleaf passed to him.
He flicked his tail at her, "Let's go." then he exited back into the busy camp.

First, Frostbone whirled her head to Sootleaf, "What's going on? Have you dreamt of this?"
"I've dreamt of war in snow, but not this. It's just a car sparring Birchstar."

"Why would someone be foolish enough to do that?"

"An eye for an eye, I suppose." he snickered, "Go. Before Wolfstar gets mad." He looked concerned, his bright white eyes tilted.
Frostbone left in a hurry, images and thoughts whirling in her head and fueling her mouth to quiver as she muttered fast to herself, "I can't believe it. I'm aiding Wolfstar. Or at least I'm following him around, like an actual deputy. I'm such a mouse-brain to leave Cougarfang and Coalspots behind. I'm such a mouse-brained coward. But there's nothing *I* can do. There's nothing I can *ever* do."

Chapter 18: Answers for my Prayer

Note: This chapter had to stop at an awkward time because it contained spoilers for the third book in which this continues. This book stretches from before the first book to the beginning of the third, of the series SandClan's Destiny.

It has been moons since the camp was filled to the brim with hostages. It has been moons since the hostages rebelled against the forces of VenomClan and their allies, and more moons still since they won, and Wolfstar claimed this was all "apart of the plan." Time had been so transient that Frostbone lost track of the moons, despite attending a certain amount of gatherings. They all felt faded or merged. The same things happened each gathering, anyway.

Studying the behavior of other Clans at those gatherings, Frostbone figured that the fear of a new threat was fading in other warriors' minds. The memory of the Dreaded Leaf-bare was still fresh to these warriors, but because new kits were being born and would never fully know of such an event, hope was blooming in the other Clans.

Something Frostbone has noticed as deputy of VenomClan was that Wolfstar rarely showed up to camp. Because Birchstar and Blackstar were allies to VenomClan, Wolfstar needn't be in charge all the time- he was up to something and it seemed he needed full privacy. Besides, his warriors have long since adopted their leader's personality, and were demonstrating it at every opportunity they could, especially when guests were around.

At this moment, Frostbone was sitting in the warrior's den, snacking on a hare some OakClanners had brought over, and resting among other VenomClan warriors who had just finished sparring. Even Frostbone had to, but she did so with Coalspots, and the latter tom cleverly fought so the two would 'tie' with each other.

Frostbone could hear Skullcrush stir next to her. He had lost his spar against a certain Icedrift from GreenClan, again in fact, and she saw him exit the warrior's den with his tail flicking to show his irritation.
Skullcrush had his cruel side, she knew. Every time he lost a spar, or anything for that matter, his jealousy augmented and he became even more cruel.

He is a monster everywhere. The way he punishes the apprentices is terrible. He can't even respect his own clanmates. Frostbone shook her head to clear the negative thoughts, and curled up to sleep.
Skullcrush wasn't the only warrior who was becoming jealous or decadent. There were plenty of VenomClan warriors who felt defensive against the other warriors in their camp, who were all competing for Wolfstar's attention. It was sick, and perhaps some warriors disliked Frostbone because of it.
Because of the small apprentice who somehow became deputy.

The deputy tried to fall asleep, but the moon's silvery glow was preventing her from doing so. Her eyelids hurt with the brightness of the light, so she sat up and studied the clearing instead. Cats were still awake, of course, sharing prey or sparring. It was too loud to sleep anyway, let alone the light of a scintillating moon.
Suddenly Frostbone saw a shape, a dark silhouette with bright eyes like the moon, float across the clearing on sepulchral paws.

Sootleaf, she realized. *It's the half-moon after all, lest I forget! But StarClan doesn't watch over VenomClan, so why does he bother? Poor tom...*

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In the morning, there were more VenomClan warriors awake than there were asleep. This was strange, because VenomClanners were typically not morning cats, unless they had to attend patrols.
Frostbone wondered if instead she slept late, but in feeling the sun's warmth on her back, she knew this was not the case. Frostbone glanced around the warrior's den, wondering if Wolfstar had led a battle and purposefully left Frostbone behind.
No, she heard voices. There was a meeting in fact, and she snorted to wonder what possibly could Wolfstar be boasting about this

time?

"What's going on?" Frostbone asked a warrior, Silentdawn.
"He--He's done something wrong!"
Redwillow arrived next to Frostbone, hissing in her ear, "He's done it this time."

Frostbone looked around. It seemed the meeting has ended, and Frostbone missed the memo. The clearing was silent and Wolfstar was sneering down at his deputy.
She felt her fur get prickly and she stepped backwards, drowning in nostalgia, and stared straight into Wolfstar's liquid gold eyes, "So. Shall I organize patrols?"

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She couldn't believe the news in which she had heard, only after the initial meeting had taken place. She sat down, her heart fluttering. She was with Redwillow and Sootleaf, looking at the stars which twinkled bright like beady eyes deep in the vacuum of space. She looked over at the red tom, "What now?"

He did not answer, nor show any signs of even listening. She knew he was, though. She glanced over at Sootleaf, about to repeat her question, but he interrupted her, "StarClan hasn't been listening to us. They haven't been watching us. But now... they cannot listen to or watch *anything*."

Epilogue

In the end, the moon cycles continued. Frostbone soon got attached to her clan in a physical sense, and less of a mental one. She knew she had to lead most of the cats someday. She was deputy after all, against her will, but she had learned over the course of the seasons how to be a better leader- by looking at Wolfstar and mentally correcting his flaws, she knew how she'd fix this clan.

It seemed pretty hopeless for the other clans as Venomclan just got stronger and the Darkforest began abducting warriors they deemed fit for the army.

She was never invited to the Darkforest again once they began their training. She was both relieved and frustrated by it.The freedom derived from not having to go where no cat deserved to tread, but her frustration was also from being withheld from its secrets.

She was still in the trio with Cougarfang and Coalspots, but she was the obvious odd one out as it was harder for all three to meet up successfully, and Cougarfang and Coalspots were much closer. Frostbone did tell them everything she knew, which was limited. She did this during each gathering, a whisper here and a whisper there before their attention had to be on the leaders.

For as long as the gatherings lasted.

After that, Cougarfang would try and catch a patrol Frostbone'd be on. She was only successful in that twice.

The moons went on and time sped until it seemed everything shut down. The stars shined brighter than anytime Frostbone could remember, and she swore there were more spotting the sky each night. But Sootleaf came to her one evening, sweeping her away into his den to share his nightmares of blackness and nothingness, like he was being snuffed out like a flame.

Frostbone sat and stared at the sky. All the beads of light winked down at her. She never felt like Starclan was present anyway, but that night it felt like a world had just died.